

THE TEMPTATIONS OF TRADE

Britain, Spain, and the Struggle
for Empire

Adrian Finucane



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THE TEMPTATIONS OF TRADE



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The TEMPTATIONS *of* TRADE



*Britain, Spain,
and the Struggle for Empire*

ADRIAN FINUCANE

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CONTENTS

Prologue: Before the Asiento	1
Chapter 1. Britain Hopes for the “Riches of America,” 1713–1716	21
Chapter 2. The Stuttering Success of the Early Trade, 1717–1728	53
Chapter 3. “Unjust Depredations” and Growing Tensions, 1729–1738	84
Chapter 4. The End of the British Asiento, 1739–1748	113
Epilogue: Beyond the Asiento	146
 List of Abbreviations	 159
Notes	161
Index	205
Acknowledgments	211

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PROLOGUE

Before the Asiento

In 1679, a young surgeon named Lionel Wafer left Jamaica, ending a visit to his brother there for more adventurous company. Like many men leaving the island at the time, Wafer had joined the buccaneers. Over the next decade, he would sail through Spanish waters, annoying their ships and settlements, making note of the natural and human resources of that empire, and even living among a native group in modern-day Panama and learning their language. He acted as a surgeon on pirate vessels and spent time in a Jamestown prison. But more than a tale of exploration and misadventure, Wafer's is a story of empire. After returning to the safety of England, Wafer published a book, *A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America*, encouraging his countrymen in England to move into the Americas in whatever ways they could in pursuit of glory and profit.¹ Early clandestine exploration into the forbidden territories of the Spanish empire fueled English interest in imperial expansion, and published accounts gave prospective voyagers details about what they might expect to encounter.

European empires in the Americas grew not only as projects of large-scale thinkers in London or Madrid, or even of the men and women who funded and organized expeditions across the Atlantic to conquer and claim land. Individuals who moved through these areas or lived there permanently, including merchants, seamen, travelers, and settlers, created the empires on the ground, shaping local realities that sometimes conflicted significantly with the hopes of those in the metropole. In this context, empire was not only a project of European nations, but a kind of strategy for some groups of subjects who could take advantage of the places that governments could and could not assert power over land and trade, making their own fortunes by valuing pragmatism over ideology.² Men like Wafer pushed for an expansion of empire through conquest or commerce into places few Englishmen had

seen. The vision of success many Britons had for their empire ultimately relied on its ability to access the considerable markets of Spanish America; at the same time, Spanish American subjects could not thrive without a consistent trade such as that provided by the British. In the early eighteenth century, the empires would briefly find a way to benefit from a trade in slaves through the British South Sea Company. However, in the course of fulfilling this mutual need, tensions increased between the empires, making long-term peaceful trade a difficult prospect. In the early eighteenth century, the people who settled in and traded to British and Spanish America would create empires that were intertwined, reliant on one another in important ways, and always blurry at the margins. Imperial agents moving through these empires operated in competition with one another, to be sure, but they contributed to building as well as unmaking each other's empires. On the ground, the creation of empires was messy, not following any one set of guidelines. Rather than being entirely at odds with one another, empires were interlinked, reliant on one another for trade and settlement in a way that could not ultimately be sustainable.³ Growth inevitably led to friction.

By the seventeenth century, Englishmen had long traded to Spain, but could not legally travel directly to the Spanish Americas except in very rare circumstances.⁴ Despite these restrictions, or perhaps in part because of them, English merchants and their government developed a strong thirst for knowledge about the Spanish colonies and access to their attendant wealth.⁵ In an attempt to fulfill this need, English travelers and privateers probed the edges of the empire, and circulated information about the little-known interiors of the Spanish territories. Despite the differences in government, religion, and demographic constitution of the British and Spanish empires, ambition was a trait shared by agents of both. Actors in each of these empires hoped to exploit local resources in order to enrich themselves, and when convenient, the metropole. As information accrued about the opportunities available in the Americas, the English government and its subjects turned to acquiring their own piece of the American continents. Wafer was one of a long line of Englishmen who had explored ways to profit from the adjacent Spanish empire, legally or illegally.⁶ While Wafer's buccaneering was part of a larger trend in piracy in both peace and wartime that raised tensions between the empires, the information he collected also represented an opportunity for English expansion and mutual trade in times of peace.

This sort of information would be critical in the decades that followed, particularly in 1713. In that year the British South Sea Company acquired the

asiento contract from Spain, guaranteeing them a right to transport a predetermined number of enslaved African laborers into Spanish American territories for a thirty-year period and to bring a limited amount of goods to the annual Portobello trade fair. This contract brought with it a guarantee of residency in Spanish America for a small group of Britons, despite earlier restrictions on their travel. The opportunity for a degree of legal trade and residency in Spain's territories also allowed the British to explore other avenues for profit, through expansion of their legal trade, contraband, and possible annexation of Spanish American land to the British Empire. The early, illegal explorations of men like Wafer convinced many among the British that moving into areas held by the Spanish would be both possible and profitable, and influenced the development of the British Empire for years to come.

Wafer began his American adventures in Jamaica, through this was far from the first voyage he had made in the wider world. By the 1670s, when he arrived on the island, he had already traveled extensively in the South Seas and in Southeast Asia. In Jamaica, which England finally wrested from the Spanish in 1655, settlers like his brother, unnamed in Wafer's account of his life, were in the process of transferring the lessons of the tiny but economically successful island of Barbados onto more plentiful fertile soil. Jamaica provided the growing English empire a key entry point into the still strong Spanish Americas through trade and piracy.⁷ As steward general of the island Cornelius Burroughs wrote only a few years after the English conquest of Jamaica, the major attractive traits of the island were that "it is a very flourishing Island, and lyes very opportunely to annoy the Spaniard, both upon the Maine, and also in his trade by Sea."⁸ During and after the seizure of Jamaica, buccaneers enjoyed English approval, sometimes tacit and sometimes official, to harass the Spanish on surrounding islands and the mainland.⁹ Success did not depend only on the opportunities for trade and cultivation enjoyed by the English. Because English presence of most kinds in the area was banned by Spanish law, English gains depended also on the failure of the Spanish, in both legal enforcement and colonization, as well as the limitation of the extensive seventeenth-century French trade to the Spanish empire.

After a short time in Jamaica, Wafer took to sea again, this time on what he described as a privateering vessel, to harass the settlements along the Spanish American coast. He provided little justification for becoming a buccaneer surgeon in his *Voyage and Description*, perhaps because of the shifting legality of the undertaking. Whatever his motivations, the decision brought him both pain and success. Wafer took advantage of the incomplete control

of the Spanish empire over its claimed lands and waterways, traveling through the “Isthmus of America” and adjacent lands for much of the 1680s, collecting information about the area and constructing a “Secret Report” in order to inform English officials of the state of the Spanish empire.¹⁰ Wafer was not an official representative of England.¹¹ But as a buccaneer surgeon, he collected information that no English official could have through legal channels. Wafer traveled to the Spanish shores at a fortuitous time for the English. Their forces had recently sacked Portobello, and some of the English had made the trek across the Isthmus of Panama to attack the Spanish in their richest and usually unchallenged settlements along the Pacific Ocean.¹² Wafer’s own crossing was the source of both the information he collected in his book and a significant wound, which he suffered in a powder accident and which forced him to live among the native Kuna people for months while he healed.¹³

During his time among the Kuna, Wafer reported that he developed friendly relationships in the area and learned about his surroundings. The local peoples had previously encountered Spanish settlers, and a number were enslaved. Because of these contacts, some spoke Spanish, which made communication with Wafer’s group possible. Wafer made a great deal in his writings of his success among these indigenous groups, bragging that the “Indians . . . in a manner ador’d me,” and even that their leader had insisted that Wafer promise to marry his daughter when she was of age. Wafer suggested that his integration into the native groups of the area was nearly complete, noting that upon reconnecting with the expedition’s English sloop after a period of months, he was barely recognized by his friends. Sitting among the Indians, “‘twas the better part of an Hour before one of the Crew, looking more narrowly upon me, cry’d out, Here’s our Doctor; and immediately they all congratulated my Arrival among them.”¹⁴ While it is impossible to determine the truth of Wafer’s claims about his time among the natives of the isthmus, his positioning of himself as an ally of these groups and of the Spanish as their tyrannical enslavers suggests to the reader that the native peoples would welcome an alternative European imperial group, and that they were in no way under the control of or in alliance with the Spanish. The way was then open for the English, if they wished to move into the area.

Following his time among the natives, Wafer continued upon various buccaneers’ sloops for several years, visiting parts of the Americas and harassing Spanish ships. These Englishmen found that the Spanish had taken steps to discourage settlement by other European groups in the area. They culled the animals on several islands near their own settlements, particularly

on the Pacific islands of Santa Maria and Juan Fernandez. On the latter island, Wafer reported, "the Spaniards had set Dogs ashore . . . to destroy the Goats there, that we might fail of Provision."¹⁵ The local Spanish settlers were clearly aware of the danger posed by the possibility of English settlement near their vulnerable colonies.

Perhaps tiring of the wanderer's life, in 1688 Wafer arranged passage to Virginia, where he reported he "thought to settle." Instead, he was imprisoned in the Jamestown jail, his goods were seized, and he was accused of piracy along with two accomplices. The men denied acting illegally, but eventually petitioned to be pardoned under the royal proclamation offering amnesty to former pirates. Though their goods remained in custody for significantly longer than they were, they were eventually released, and Wafer made his way to England in 1690.¹⁶

In England, Wafer turned his attentions to encouraging the expansion of the English empire into the Spanish territories. He was in good company. While in the Caribbean, he had sailed with the famed circumnavigator William Dampier, whose *Voyage Round the World* brought news of Spanish wealth to English-speaking readers. During his travels, Dampier managed to consult people with extensive knowledge of the areas in which he sailed, including "Spanish Pilots, and Indians bred under the Spaniards."¹⁷ Working with these informants, Dampier determined that there were many rivers and tributaries on the Isthmus of Panama that had not yet been navigated by the Spanish, suggesting that they might be open to claims by the English. His writings stressed that Spanish lands were desirable, necessary, and even pragmatically possible to take over. This sort of information was critical to the expanding English empire.

In their books, both Wafer and Dampier described their travels through the Bay of Panama and detailed the flora, fauna, and trade of the area, as well as the local method of government. Dampier observed also that the city had been reconstructed with stronger buildings since it was burned by Sir Henry Morgan decades before. Providing English readers with this information, Dampier simultaneously suggested the gains that were to be reaped by controlling this area and warned of the difficulties that a military attack on the area would face. He made clear the attractive possibilities present in the area for foreign trade, citing the success of the French, who "at present make very great and profitable Voyages; and now that they find the sweet of it, they will be sure, if they can, to settle a firm and lasting Trade here."¹⁸ Diplomacy leading to peaceful commerce could help the English against their French

enemies at the same time that they gained access to Spanish lands. If the English could intervene and become the primary suppliers of European goods to the Spanish empire, this suggests, they might both deal a blow to French profits and enjoy their own rewards.

If this opportunity did not by itself convince the English to move into the area, the mistreatment of their own subjects might do so. While Dampier appears to have had extensive contact with subjects of the Spanish empire during his time along the coasts, and this seems to have been for the most part friendly and productive for him, other Englishmen did not fare as well. Dampier brought aboard a man named William Wooders, for example, a sailor from Jamaica who was captured by the Spanish and lived as a prisoner in Mexico City for many months.¹⁹ Wooders, whose knowledge of the area and its waters kept Dampier's ships out of danger, was but one of many Englishmen who had been imprisoned by defenders of the Spanish empire. Trade could not be expected to flourish in the area as long as the Spanish had such a degree of power over members of other European empires in such a great swath of the Americas. This threat provided an additional argument for hurting the Spanish empire by taking its lands; moving into South America was both an opportunity and a means of defense for the small but growing English empire.

Not all the information these men collected about the Spanish Americas was intended for wide publication. Perhaps in an attempt to ingratiate himself to the officials in London in the face of accusations of piracy, in 1698 Wafer constructed his "Secret Report," providing the English with key information about the Spanish empire. He was enthusiastic about trade and especially settlement in large parts of the continents. He noted that the Rio de la Plata was particularly well situated to allow trade into the rest of the Spanish empire, writing that "Hear a factory wold be of great Use to us."²⁰ If English merchants could live near the Rio de la Plata, they might do business with local Spanish subjects in need of an alternate source of European goods to the sporadic trade fairs at Portobello. They might also begin to expand English knowledge of the Spanish empire, possibly creating an opportunity for a more permanent expansion into Spanish holdings, as well as damaging Spanish trade and weakening their position on the American continents. Drawing on his knowledge of the native peoples in these areas, Wafer assured the duke of Leeds, to whom the report was addressed, that they would be eager to join with the English against the Spanish threat.²¹

Though this "Secret Report" was not widely published at the time, many

of Wafer's observations about the benefits of specific Spanish ports also appeared to one degree or another in his *Voyage and Description*, published the following year. In the first edition, he assured his readers that he intended mainly to describe the Isthmus of Darien. In his preface to the 1704 edition, written after the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession, Wafer became bolder. He explicitly argued for the creation of an English "establishment" in the area, which he insisted to readers "might be very easily effected."²²

The publications circulating in the English-speaking world gave readers and hearers of these tales a sense of the immense possibilities for riches in the Americas. Along with this, the writers inculcated their audiences with the sense that only English settlement could properly control these areas; anywhere the Spanish held, they argued, they would spread Catholicism, cruelty, and bad management. The extent, climate, and topography of these lands, along with the entrenchment of the Spanish presence, however, made full-scale seizure of the continents impossible. The English merchants and colonizers instead had to pursue a number of complementary as well as competing approaches in order to secure American profits for themselves, both allowing the creation of small settlements, some quite close to Spanish shores, and moving toward an increasingly close trade with the Spanish Americas.²³ These attempts to encroach on Spanish trade and territory were undertaken on the part of the English government, independent traders, other individuals, and eventually, the British South Sea Company. Both governmental and nongovernmental actors made important efforts toward securing Spanish American profits, and unofficial acts could often influence the development of official policy. While it still faced challenges from the Spanish, the British navy had undergone growth, and government ships shared the ports with a significant merchant fleet.²⁴ Along with the experience of Spanish trade made possible by the diplomacy of an earlier age, this positioned the English well to take advantage of Spanish American trading opportunities in the early eighteenth century.

While he did not voyage far from home again, Wafer continued to promote the expansion of colonists and trade from what would soon become Great Britain into the Spanish Americas in other ways. In 1697 and 1698 he acted as an advisor to the Company of Scotland, which created a brief Scottish settlement at Darien, in modern-day Panama.²⁵ He encouraged the venture, giving the company more detail than was available from any other source about the landscape, dangers, and native inhabitants. The settlement's

location near one of the quickest land routes between the Atlantic and the Pacific made it particularly strategic if the emerging and ultimately unrealized Scottish empire wished to engage in large-scale trade from the Americas. Landing on the coast in 1698, the small group of twelve hundred Scottish settlers encountered a group of native Kuna Indians, who they called Dariens. This group had a long history of interaction with Europeans, including English buccaneers who raided the coast, but the Kuna were not living under Spanish rule.²⁶ A Scottish pamphleteer explained that despite controlling many of the lands around Darien, “the Spaniards cannot pretend a Title to that Country by Inheritance, Marriage, or the Donation of Prince and People; and as to Conquest it would be ridiculous to alledge it, since the Dariens are in actual possession of their Liberty, and were never subdued, nor receiv’d any Spanish Governour or Garrison amongst them.”²⁷ If the local Indians owned the area, the Scots could contract with them directly to settle on the land without Spanish interference. Those wishing to expand European empires did not only have to consider other Europeans when choosing locations and making connections; the loyalties of the Darien Indians would remain an important consideration for at least the next half-century.²⁸ By advising the Company of Scotland and publishing his book in London only a year into their settlement, Wafer simultaneously supported the two linked nations’ attempts on Spanish territories, offering his support to those who would pay for it.²⁹ Like many of his buccaneering and smuggling counterparts, Wafer privileged his purse over any strict allegiance to his country of birth.

Despite the initial problems the Scottish adventurers encountered with the nearby Spanish settlers, the news that filtered back to Scotland and England was not entirely negative. The Darien colony did fail in 1699, due to a combination of internal divisions and external pressures, but interactions with local peoples suggested that the idea of incursions into the area might be profitably revisited.³⁰ In particular, Darien settler Francis Borland and others noted that the native people living near Darien welcomed the Scottish colonists and encouraged their plans. Reports indicated that “the chief Indians here being friendly to them, welcomed them to settle in their Country, and consented to a Grant unto them of that Place and Lands adjacent.”³¹ Native peoples from Panama would not only tolerate, but in fact welcome the Scots, preferring their alliance to the poor treatment they received from the Spanish. Those who supported English colonial expansion took this as evidence that the English too might benefit from settling in the area, given the limited

success that the much smaller Scottish empire had enjoyed. This hope would persist for decades, through the union of the countries.

The Spanish government in Madrid had long been anxious about the persistent English presence within what they considered to be their own sphere. The records of the Spanish empire reveal a marked concern with the location of English settlements, their fortifications, and their status with regard to native groups in the borderland areas, information similar to that recorded by English travelers. Though initially quite small, the settlement of Jamestown in 1607 sparked debate in Spain about appropriate responses to what seemed an obvious challenge to Spain's claims on the Americas. The Council of War attempted to increase their forces at Saint Augustine in Florida, the nearest Spanish fortifications. In addition, the Spanish ambassador, Pedro de Zúñiga, relayed information about England's colonial efforts to his king, warning of the threat to Spain's holdings and the possibility that the English could launch piratical attacks from the North American coast.³² The anxiety expressed by the Spanish at the Jamestown settlement suggests the reality of the new threat posed by English expansion.

As Wafer, Dampier, and their fellow writers suggest, merchants, privateers, adventurers, settlers, and thinkers of England did not, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, have any single agreed-upon approach to the creation of what might be called empire. They hoped to be able to take advantage of the riches that the Spanish had found in their American holdings, though no one model existed for transferring these riches into English hands. Some expected that taking land directly from the Spanish would do the most to benefit themselves and their nation while doing damage to their rivals in the Americas. Others were content to allow the Spanish to do the hard work of extracting silver and gold from the ground, intending to collect it later through trade. Many with plans for the Americas took the most pragmatic approach on the ground; they would whittle away at Spanish lands where they could, and trade with the Spanish where supplanting them seemed impossible.³³

If English access to the Spanish empire was to be had peacefully, the most lucrative inroad would be through trade. Opportunities for trade to the Spanish empire had grown piecemeal during the late seventeenth century, with treaties in 1667 and 1670 offering legal if limited trade to Old Spain within certain conditions and delineating appropriate channels for members of each empire to claim redress against the other.³⁴ It did not allow Englishmen any extended residency in Spanish American lands, a necessity if they

were to conduct a long-term trade. Until 1713, very few English subjects could hope to have extensive contacts with members of the Spanish empire in the Americas while maintaining close affiliation with and loyalty to their country of origin.³⁵

In the first two decades of the eighteenth century the nations of Europe clashed over the future rule of Spain and its colonial dependencies. The Spanish king Charles II died late in the year 1700, leaving the throne to the French Louis XIV's grandson. The succession of Philip V to the throne had the effect, troubling to the rest of Europe, of transferring control over the Spanish throne from the House of Habsburg to Philip's own House of Bourbon. The new possibility that the same person might hold the French and Spanish crowns, with the concomitant threat of divisive international alliances for and against this possibility, incited a twelve-year war. England particularly dreaded the potential for strengthened national connections between the French and Spanish monarchies, given the country's long history of conflict with Catholic powers. If these two enemy nations were to unite, English power in the Old and New Worlds would be unable to stand against the Catholics in Europe and the Americas. Opportunities to trade to Spanish territories might be wholly swallowed up by competition from the French, who had been so successful in the Spanish American trade in previous decades. Given the Bourbon threat, England and its allies, including Portugal and the Holy Roman Empire, united against the Spanish succession and waged war against the possibility of Philip's rule. The war not only extended through Europe but included battles in areas as diverse as the English North American frontier in Massachusetts Bay and the harbors of the Caribbean Sea.³⁶

As the war drew to a conclusion, Britons continued to move through the West Indies and the Americas and to collect information from diverse sources in order to assess the possibilities for British profit in the area. The cartographer Herman Moll, for instance, published his observations on the "Coasts, Countries and Islands within the Limits of the South-Sea Company" in 1711, anticipating the trade that would be possible with the imminent peace. He based his information concerning the fortifications of the Spanish and the state of their mining of precious metals on the existing publications and manuscripts on the subject in Britain.³⁷ The details of Moll's maps suggest that they influenced Daniel Defoe, the propagandist whose support for the South Sea Company and general British settlement in the Americas helped kick-start the trade in the succeeding years.³⁸ Printed and reprinted throughout the early eighteenth century, Moll's maps would provide some of

the best and most public information on the Spanish Americas and encourage Britons to take advantage of this knowledge.

In addition to maps, the printers of London published numerous encouragements for Britain to engage with Spanish lands, including a reprint of Wafer's book in 1705, just a year before his death. In a letter to Parliament in 1711, an anonymous pamphleteer sang the praises of the Spanish American holdings, noting that "South America is indeed the only inexhaustible Fountain of those Treasures, and from its first Discovery and Possession by the Spaniards, immense Sums have been from Time to Time brought from thence, in Returns of the Goods of Europe."³⁹ If the English could take over the area, their superior naval capabilities and considerable trading network could move into parts of the Spanish Americas, enriching the metropole and providing an important outlet for excess manufactured goods and idle population. If the Spanish Americas were not at the moment producing stupendous riches for their owners, the pamphleteer suggested, this was not the fault of the colonies, but of the Spaniards themselves. He argued that "the Spaniard from their Slothfull Temper, and from their innate Pride, or from an inaptness to Manufactures, have not had the Advantages that they might have had, by the Possession of those Treasures."⁴⁰ If the English possessed these lands, this suggests, they could easily leverage their situation in order to place themselves in control of the majority of trade to the Americas. This opinion would persist for decades. In 1731, British captain Fayrer Hall echoed this sentiment, noting that wealth made the Spanish "supine, indolent, careless and inactive" and that the Church made them weak. Though they held extensive and potentially productive lands, they did not make full use of possessions like Puerto Rico.⁴¹ Controlling the Americas, it was hoped, would also allow the English to halt further conversion of the native peoples to Catholicism, and to weaken Spain's control globally.

In 1713, with the success of anti-Bourbon forces, the contending parties agreed to the Peace of Utrecht. In addition to ending the threat of the union of the French and Spanish thrones under a single monarch, this treaty had significant consequences worldwide. Great Britain largely controlled the details of the peace, and the treaties were written very much to their advantage. In addition to breaking down the growing power of the House of Bourbon in Europe, Britain won Gibraltar and Minorca from Spain and in the New World forced Spain to concede trading rights to its formerly closed American empire. The treaty created a defensive alliance of sorts between Britain and Spain: Spain was forbidden to allow other nations to take control of its own

American colonies, and Britain pledged to defend those colonies from foreign encroachment.⁴² One of the most important concessions that the British forced in the formulation and signing of the Peace of Utrecht related to the slave trade, especially the highly coveted *asiento*. The economic and political importance of this trade has been well established by historians, but to this point there has been little attention to the effect of the *asiento* contract, the consequent sustained individual interaction between members of the British and Spanish empires, and the influence of the trade on the formation of the empires.⁴³

The innovation here was in allowing British subjects long-term residency in Spanish American trading posts and the right to a limited legal trade, but a limited contact in the form of contraband had long flourished between the empires. The writings of Britons such as Robert Allen make clear that the official status of Anglo-Spanish trading in the West Indies sometimes had little to do with the actual trade that occurred in the Americas. Allen, who had survived the Darien settlement, based his observations on the authority of his having lived in Panama and Quito for several years.⁴⁴ Allen had an unusually broad experience of the Spanish empire, given the usual limits to travel by non-Spaniards; after the Darien experiment failed, he reported, he was captured while on a raiding expedition on the Isthmus of Panama and became a secretary to a high-ranking official in the region that eventually became Ecuador.⁴⁵ Having made his way back to his own empire, he encouraged the expansion of foreign trade. Allen noted that trade from England to the Spanish lands in America had for a very long time been conducted through Spanish agents living in Cádiz, creating an extra step in selling merchandise and subtracting significant Spanish duties from the profits of the British.⁴⁶ After the 1655 takeover of Jamaica, though, Englishmen living in the area “became acquainted with the Spaniards of those Parts, and continu’d to keep a Correspondence and small trade with them, and they with us for Provisions mostly, and some few dry Goods and Negroes by stealth.” Far from mainland Europe, this clandestine trade could flourish, and with it, the repeated interaction of Spanish and English subjects. Even those safeguards that had been put in place by Spanish officials on the European continent and in the colonies did little to discourage this interaction and trade; Allen conceded that Spanish penalties for contraband trade were “very severe,” but reported that nonetheless a number of Spanish guards had themselves come to British ships to conduct a private trade.⁴⁷

The *asiento* contract allowed for open, though limited, trade, and would

meet Spain's needs. The links between the Spanish and English empires in the early eighteenth century centered on a mutual interest: the slave trade. The Spanish empire in the Americas relied on slave labor. While Spanish Americans made wide use of native coerced and tribute labor in the early years of settlement, the empire still required an outside source of forced labor to meet all its needs on the Caribbean plantations, in urban household service, and in the silver mines in areas such as Potosí. The Spanish turned to the large-scale importation of enslaved Africans in the early sixteenth century.⁴⁸ Spanish merchants lacked a strong foothold on the African coast, and relied on other nations to supply them with slaves; the Portuguese, the French, the Dutch, and the English, in particular, had obliged their need for a steady supply of laborers from 1518, when the Spanish first permitted a monopoly on importing slaves into the Indies, to the turn of the eighteenth century.⁴⁹ The *asiento* was coveted among the nations of Europe. It guaranteed the holders a significant market and source of revenue in Spanish America, the possibility of trade in other goods, and access to the specie that flowed from the Spanish mines, as well as an opportunity for the ships of that nation to access Spanish ports, where they might engage in the significant contraband trade to the area.

Throughout the Caribbean and the North American mainland colonies, the English had long had access to enslaved African laborers, and even before they secured the official trade to the Spanish empire, they were important suppliers for Spanish slave agents. As their American settlements expanded, the English became increasingly enthusiastic about securing a steady source of enslaved labor. In 1672 the English government granted the Royal African Company a monopoly on the trade to the African coast, where they established a source for the slaves that would go to the English colonies, and many of those who would eventually end up being sold to the Spanish.⁵⁰ With the support of James II, the Royal African Company created trading posts known as factories in West Africa, where they had access to slaves as well ivory, hides, dyewood, and other commodities. There they formed diplomatic relationships with African leaders who could provide them with slaves, securing an English foothold amid the other European nations trading to the area.⁵¹ The Royal African Company, James hoped, would supply the growing colonies in the Americas with slaves sufficient to meet their labor needs, expand plantations, and secure the land for England. Here, as with the later development of the South Sea Company, the attempt to involve government in a profitable trade meant that private traders who operated under previous systems were sometimes displaced.



Figure 1. Map of Spanish and British territorial claims in 1713. Spain's early eighteenth-century land holdings and trade monopolies were very attractive to the expanding British Empire. Map by Darin Grauberger, University of Kansas Cartographic Services.

Many in Great Britain enthusiastically embraced the asiento in 1713.⁵² The contract did not guarantee the full and direct trade that the British would have preferred, but the agreement did allow for some trade to the West Indies and kindled hopes for further expansion.⁵³ The asiento treaty gave the British the opportunity to make use of their extensive trade to the African coast to move directly into the Spanish American empire. The broad outlines of this trade have been well-documented. Queen Anne permitted the South Sea Company to fulfill the contract, giving them a monopoly on Spain's American slave trade. The contract obligated the company to import 4,800 slaves into the Spanish Americas each year for a term of thirty years. The British won a further concession from the Spanish, with permission to send one ship of five hundred tons to the trade fair at Portobello each year, a key opportunity to bring British goods into the protected markets of the Spanish colonies. The Spanish allowed the Company to place a limited number of British slave traders in Spanish American port cities, including Cartagena, Buenos Aires, Veracruz, Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Portobello, and Panama.⁵⁴ In these ports the South Sea Company agents, called factors, came into close and sustained contact with subjects of the Spanish empire, and formed trading and personal relationships that extended far beyond the legal limitations established by the contract.⁵⁵ As a result, new networks of illegal trade developed, causing tension between the British and Spanish on an imperial level while strengthening interpersonal alliances and cooperation in the West Indies.

Drawing on decades of information gathering from settlers and travelers, the British knew that the Spanish could be valuable trading partners. Moving forward would mean increased contact between empires, both on an imperial level and for individual subjects of each empire, contact that would mean both profit and potential danger. As English Protestant men and women founded their own colonies, and traveled through those of Spain, they moved away from the center of English power, and new situations and environments challenged their imperial and confessional identities. On the edges of empire, simultaneously the most important site of expansion and maintenance and the most vulnerable imperial location, merchants and travelers could find that being British was not the most salient of their identities. Being Europeans engaged in the importation of thousands of African slaves, being traders with ties to a particular locale, or being individuals with a desire for personal enrichment could all become much more important than being Britons and supporting their nation through conquest or trade. As the English began the

process of building their own imperial Americas, they faced new troubles and greater opportunities than ever.

The South Sea Company trade was a tempting opportunity for many Britons. One of the major benefits of the trade, from the perspective of individual merchants and even some South Sea Company officials, was that it offered a legitimate cover for British ships operating in Spanish American territories, where they might engage in a combination of legal and contraband trade. This could mean great profit for the country and its subjects, some argued, especially if one considered the additional smuggling opportunities available at the yearly trade fair. These hopes, projected onto imperial designs, drove the support for the company's trade in the Americas, but it would ultimately prove destructive. Imagined profits always exceeded actual profits for the company and the nation in this trade. Conflict over contraband, and the piracy that surrounded it, would ultimately drive the British and Spanish empires to a war that ended the contract. Enthusiasm for the company had always been based on possibilities, on potential that would not ultimately be fulfilled.

The British *asiento* trade and the resulting interactions between the merchants and the Spanish encompassed both empires and comprised an inter-imperial history that developed over a large geographical area. Anglo-Spanish relations made possible by the *asiento* treaty extended to the greater West Indies, through the Spanish Main, well into South America and even along parts of the Pacific Coast; some Britons even hoped, as the name of the company suggests, that the trade would give the empire access to the markets of Asia through the South Sea, the contemporary term for the Pacific Ocean.⁵⁶ The British and Spanish empires shared an interest in the Caribbean and its surroundings, as it was a major avenue for providing the colonies with slaves and trade goods, and a source of enormous wealth because of shipping and sugar. The economic power of the Caribbean, and the mix of people who settled there, made it a center of European concern.⁵⁷ While this may at first seem a peripheral space, in fact, a study of social relations and economic cooperation in this area illuminates it as an area of considerable concern for these empires. Trade, both legal and illegal, piracy, religious conflict, and the complicating presence of non-Europeans in areas claimed by the empires, all drew the attention of the wider British and Spanish worlds.⁵⁸ Trade along the edges of these empires led to the development of deeply interconnected histories. British and Spanish individuals could become intimately involved in building up each other's colonial projects, supplying their sometime enemies with enslaved laborers, trade goods, and profits.

While many historians have considered the Spanish and British empires entirely separately, a close consideration of the whole of the early modern Americas reveals a region that is best considered as a site of interaction and overlap.⁵⁹ This book joins recent scholarship that highlights the interactivity of the Americas, arguing for what one historian has called the “entangled” nature of the European colonial projects, especially those of Britain and Spain in the early eighteenth century.⁶⁰ Looking at the points of articulation between the areas controlled to various degrees by each empire, and considering the connections, cooperation, and entanglements they experienced as they grew and fell apart, allows for a more complex understanding of the formation of large parts of the American landscapes.⁶¹ If the British Empire was, in one historian’s formulation, “Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free,” these categories could, and indeed did, become muddled on the edges: Protestants mingling with Catholics, official trade flowing alongside contraband, and interest in commerce mixing with calls for geographic expansion.⁶² Britons moving on the edge of empire sometimes preferred the Spanish to their countrymen and Spanish lands to English ones. Entanglement had consequences for individuals, but more importantly influenced the development of empires even at the broadest levels.

This book takes a new approach to the South Sea Company. Histories of the company have largely focused on the stock bubble of the 1720s, which destroyed many fortunes and devastated the English market.⁶³ That scholarship has emphasized how the trade was, in the end, a failure. Other historians detail the complex workings of the trade in Europe, Africa, and the Americas, though they have said little about the interactions between British and Spanish subjects and the influence of these interactions on the empires at large.⁶⁴ Without discounting the importance of the financial disaster to which the company contributed or the contract’s diplomatic or business details, this study puts aside the well-documented impact in Europe to argue that the real importance of the South Sea Company’s presence in the Americas lay in its bringing together of the Spanish and British imperial projects at the level of individual actors. With greater attention to the activities of the company’s agents on the ground, and their interaction with larger political and economic forces within the empires, it becomes clear that these empires were crucial to one another’s development, internally contested, and blurred on the margins, especially in a Caribbean context.⁶⁵

At the intersection of individual and imperial history, individuals’ decisions had impacts on empires, and individuals’ opportunities were created or

limited by the particular forms empires took. Given these connections, this study approaches the history of the South Sea Company and the eighteenth-century British and Spanish empires through a biographical lens. Particularly detailed historical records have survived concerning the lives of Thomas Dover, John Burnet, Jonathan Dennis, and James Houstoun, all company employees who lived and worked in the Spanish empire, many for years. Attention to their individual lives allows for the reconstruction of the history of the British and Spanish empires at the level of the people building it, people who were tempted by the American trade and at the same time threatened by it.⁶⁶

The South Sea Company trade offered a wealth of opportunity to a specific subsection of British and Spanish subjects, working within, on the margins, or outside the control of their empires. The early eighteenth-century Spanish and British empires were made up of a wide variety of interest groups, operating not only in courts and legislatures in Europe but also in the Americas. The development of the Anglo-Spanish slave trade in the British *asiento* period was part of a larger set of struggles, between private enterprises and those granted a monopoly by the state, between those who envisioned an empire mainly built on territorial expansion and those who wished to expand British power through trade, and between the needs of the empire as a whole and its agents on the ground, who were often most concerned with benefiting themselves.⁶⁷ While the exercise of greater governmental control benefited those involved with the South Sea Company, those who had profited from the “salutary neglect” of the earlier period found themselves shut out of the imperial gains.⁶⁸ In London, those involved with running the trade, and those few who were able to make their fortunes from South Sea stock before the bubble burst, also found the possibilities opened by the *asiento* contract quite exciting. The Spanish American subjects who received these British imports, in both slaves and merchandise, benefited also from access to otherwise unavailable goods, and some Spanish American officials were more concerned with supplying their viceroalties and filling their pockets than with the policies promulgated from Madrid. Individuals from each empire connected, made friendships, and traded goods and information. This interimperial network, created on the ground in the Americas, created the necessary framework to facilitate interimperial commerce and guarantee profit to some.

The multidimensional opportunities inherent in the company’s trade caused problems that eventually led to the end of cooperation. As networks

developed, so did the prospects for a variety of contraband trade, illegal in the eyes of the imperial metropolises, sometimes sanctioned by local officials, and at other times more clandestine. Far from the halls of government in the metropolises, the official policies of the colonial governments were consistently less important than the practicalities that surrounded these agents of empire. Individuals operated within empires, leading to conflict between official policy and the execution of imperial plans on the ground. The very peace that allowed for this trade also created lawlessness and disorder in the Americas. In order to take advantage of the large amounts of specie and merchandise moving through the West Indies, and unable to engage in the privateering that had once been so important to Caribbean life, pirates sprang up in both empires, and Spanish *guardacostas*, or coast guard ships, meant to protect against both pirates and the smuggling trade, attacked British ships. The contraband trade, piracy, and the discontent that these caused in both empires, paired with complaints lobbed by both the Spanish government and the South Sea Company, precipitated the ultimate breakdown of cooperative relations between Britain and Spain in the slave trade. For the South Sea Company, empire was practiced at the periphery in ways that relied on but were ultimately destructive to the imperial plans constructed in London and Madrid.

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CHAPTER 1

Britain Hopes for the “Riches of America,” 1713–1716

Through the seventeenth century, the English had been interested in taking over lands claimed by the Spanish, particularly in the West Indies and the North American mainland. By the second decade of the eighteenth century, this push for land was partially overtaken with a concern for trade as the main method of extracting Spanish American riches. The career trajectory of one South Sea Company agent, Thomas Dover, mirrors the shift in British strategies in regards to the Spanish. Although he had sailed against the Spanish during the War of the Spanish Succession, after the peace Dover became a company surgeon, profiting from the Spanish in an entirely new way. This was not a complete shift to trade for the British; among the many conflicting interests in the empire, there remained those who hoped to seize Spanish American lands throughout the British *asiento* period, but the early eighteenth century was a period of experimentation and possibility. During the difficult first years of the treaty, men like Dover took advantage of the newly agreed upon peace to take a new approach to the Spanish empire based on cooperative trade, an approach that pursued economic opportunities that would never be fully realized for the British Empire.

Dover already had quite a bit of experience in the Spanish Americas before the South Sea Company appointed him chief factor at its Buenos Aires factory in the fall of 1714. A physician educated at Oxford and Cambridge, with an active practice in the bustling port city of Bristol, Dover traveled to the West Indies several times on slaving voyages and explorations. As third in command on the famous voyage of privateer Woodes Rogers in 1708–1711, he had a hand in circumnavigating the world and attacking Spanish settlements along the American coast.¹ As a member of one of the early voyages meant to

harass the Spanish and gather information for possible English encroachment into the area, Dover was part of the wartime move to begin to displace the Spanish. As a factor for the South Sea Company, he meant to profit from their presence in the Americas. These tensions, including the desire of some to oust the Spaniards, the need for them to be present and to consume British merchandise, and the pragmatic attempt of many to take advantage of the situation in the Americas regardless whether it benefited the empire or just their own pocketbook, persisted throughout the *asiento* period.

Dover sailed with the first group of ships to travel from Great Britain to the Spanish American coasts after the 1713 peace, but unlike many of the other South Sea Company employees, he had seen those shores before. As part of the Rogers voyage, Dover insisted on taking aggressive actions against the Spanish in 1709, despite the relative weakness of his own small fleet. Under Dover's command, the English ships attacked and seized Guayaquil in what would become Ecuador, which had recently been ravaged by what Dover called a "plague," and burned the city.² The city's weary inhabitants capitulated to Dover's assault, which permanently drove out many inhabitants whose wealth was seized and homes destroyed.³

When choosing Dover to conduct their trade in Buenos Aires, the South Sea Company opted for a man who had already taken an aggressive stance toward the Spanish. As a trading agent, he would be well positioned to take advantage of his location in the Spanish empire, whether it meant trading slaves and goods for Spanish specie or determining where the British might usefully make incursions into Spanish American land holdings. Dover bragged of his extensive travels and experiences abroad, opining that "if Travelling be necessary to make an accomplished Physician, I am very sure that I have travelled more than all the Physicians in Great Britain put together."⁴ Dover's explorations made him more useful both as a doctor and an agent of expansion for Britain's merchant empire.

Dover and his fellow traders would find their loyalties challenged, their systems shocked by new social environments and climates, and their ability to conduct their trade thwarted by the vagaries of life in the West Indies. At the same time, these men participated both in the construction of their own nation's overseas power and that of the often-enemy Spanish empire. As agents of the trade in slaves and other goods, the employees of the company simultaneously hoped to enrich themselves and their home country even as they lent support to the growing Spanish empire, supplying it with much-needed labor and supplies.⁵ By taking advantage of the *asiento* contract, the

British government and its agents in the company could not help but assist the Spanish in building their own power in the Americas.

Dover was far from the only man with extralegal experience in the Spanish West Indies before turning his attention to supporting the interests of the South Sea Company. Manuel Manasses Gilligan, an Irish Catholic merchant, had also spent extensive time on the Spanish American coasts. During the 1702–1713 war, when the legality of trade to the Spanish empire was in flux and at times unclear, Gilligan took advantage of the confusion and conducted a trade to the Spanish Main. As far as the Barbados Vice-Admiralty Court was concerned, this was a contraband trade, and they prosecuted and convicted Gilligan. He eventually won an appeal in England and returned to his business, taking advantage of policies after 1704 that allowed a limited trade to the Spanish coast by English and Dutch vessels despite the war. As the war came to a close, the British government called Gilligan to Madrid, where he was asked to draw on his extensive experience with legal and illegal Anglo-Spanish trade in the Caribbean to participate in negotiations for the *asiento* contract.⁶ His work had been limited and illegal at the beginning of the war; at the end, his flouting of English colonial law transformed him into a valuable asset to those in Britain interested in formalizing the trade. Like Dover, Gilligan moved from illegal or quasi-legal activities to participating in official aspects of the expansion of the British Empire, and potential profits, on the coasts of Spanish America. These South Sea Company agents, like so many of their countrymen, took advantage of the British Empire in whatever way seemed most profitable at the time.

The British *Asiento* Contract

Dover and his fellow factors had permission from the Spanish to live in the Spanish Americas because of the *asiento* contract. Spain's King Philip V and Britain's Queen Anne signed the *asiento* treaty on March 26, 1713, intending it to come into effect on the first of May of that same year. The contract stipulated that for a period of thirty years, until 1743, the British would supply the Spanish Americas with slaves brought from Africa.⁷ This had the dual benefit of creating a legal way for Great Britain to trade to the Spanish Americas and banning the rival French from these same areas. It required the South Sea Company, which had been given a charter that allowed them the sole right to trade from British territories to South America from 1711 onward, to provide

the vast regions of the Spanish Americas with 144,000 slaves, at the rate of 4,800 per year.⁸ In order to conduct this massive trade in human beings the Spanish permitted the British to construct trading posts, known as factories, and to place agents known as factors at the Spanish American cities of Cartagena, Buenos Aires, Vera Cruz, Havana, Panama, Santiago de Cuba, Caracas, and Portobello, and allowed them to import slaves to but not live in several additional Spanish ports.⁹ The Spanish also made an exception to the laws forbidding most non-Spanish trade with the colonies, allowing the British to send one ship to Portobello each year for the major trade fair.¹⁰ This trade agreement gave Britain more extensive access to Spanish American markets than even the French had enjoyed, and the Spanish agreed to this stipulation reluctantly, given the damage it was sure to do to the monopoly previously enjoyed by their own importers.¹¹ This “permission ship” had an advantage over British trade through Cádiz or Seville, as merchants were able to avoid paying Spain’s taxes.¹² The British ship would bring a variety of goods coveted in the Spanish Americas: according to the Spanish trade official Joseph de Veitia Linage, these included serges, woolen hose, silk hose, wrought pewter and tin, Scotch linen, calicoes, pepper, musk, amber, civet, and other merchandise.¹³ In return for these considerations, the Spanish king required that the South Sea Company provide him with a payment of two hundred thousand pieces of eight, in addition to a duty on each slave sale.¹⁴ The trade would provide needed goods and slaves to Spanish ports, enrich the Spanish king, and fill the pockets of the South Sea Company’s investors.

Though the contract technically existed between the monarchs, Queen Anne granted the right to fulfill the trade to the South Sea Company, formed in 1711 by the Tory lord treasurer, Robert Harley.¹⁵ The East India Company and others had set a precedent for overseas trading, but the South Sea Company was engaging in a fundamentally different sort of commerce, bringing slaves and merchandise mainly to the subjects of another European power in the Americas. The South Sea Company did not ultimately support the type of settlement and establishment of sovereignty over the areas to which they traded exercised by the East India Company, though some did have aspirations in that direction, especially considering the important routes to the Pacific controlled by the Spanish.¹⁶ Early on, the South Sea Company’s designs for the Spanish Americas extended beyond controlling its interimperial commerce, as in 1712 the company planned to send an expedition into Pacific South America to establish a settlement that could trade directly to the Spanish colonies surrounding it, though this was not carried out.¹⁷

As a corporation meant to take over a major overseas trade concession, the South Sea Company was organized to govern itself and the small groups of Britons it sent abroad. The company's charter established a court of directors of thirty members under a governor, subgovernor, and deputy governor, all to be elected by the stockholders. The directors maintained regular contact with the company's agents abroad, making decisions about who to hire and where to deploy their merchants and surgeons. While the company did not have control of large areas of land as the East India Company eventually would, they did have "ordering, rule, and government" of their forts and settlements, and were allowed to organize a force for their defense. While they were required to adhere to some Spanish laws, they were permitted to create a court of judicature to hold hearings on merchant and maritime cases. The crown intended this legal power to allow them to prevent others from trading in the South Sea Company's jurisdiction.¹⁸

The Spanish allowed this British presence in order to maintain importations of enslaved African laborers. As holders of the *asiento* contract, the Spanish required the South Sea Company to import 4,800 *piezas de indias*, the standard unit for slaves, annually, for a period of thirty years. For each of these slaves the company would pay the Spanish crown at a rate of 33 1/3 pesos, except for the last 800, which were to be sold without duty.¹⁹ The company would never successfully import the full complement of slaves they were allowed, and may not have expected that that portion of the trade would be particularly profitable. Instead, the real value of the *asiento* trade lay in the political power it offered, as well as the profit possibilities inherent in the annual "permission" ship and the extensive contraband smuggling that accompanied the movement of British ships onto Spanish American shores.²⁰

For many in Britain, the most important function of the company was financial. It agreed to absorb a significant portion of the public debt that built up during the War of the Spanish Succession, offering stock at ever-increasing prices through 1720, when the wild speculation had run its expensive course and the bubble burst.²¹ While this failure has been widely studied, the trading activities of the company have been of interest to fewer scholars, despite the fact that the South Sea Company continued to function in the Spanish Americas long after it ceased to be of financial benefit to the nation.²²

The provisions of the *asiento* treaty suggest some of the hopes and fears with which each of these empires entered the agreement. The British saw an enticing opportunity to expand their own trade in slaves and manufactured goods and to exercise their considerable naval power; long before the moral

debates about abolition became widespread, this seemed simply another opportunity for financial gain.²³ Taking over the trade also allowed the nation to reduce the trading power of the French, who had previously dominated Spanish American trade.²⁴ While the contract allowed the ships bringing slaves and goods into the Spanish Empire to belong to and be crewed by either their own or British subjects, the British preferred and used their own extensive fleet, a key part of the Navigation Acts.²⁵ The Spanish demonstrated their own fears over the new presence of large trading delegations from the long-oppositional British Empire by demanding that “neither the Commanders of those ships . . . nor the Mariners do give any Offence, or cause any Scandal to the exercise of the Roman Catholick Religion.”²⁶ It would have been unnecessary to create injunctions against British sailors offending the Catholic religion unless the Spanish expected that this would be an inevitable problem, as it had long been with English merchants living in Old Spain.²⁷

Like the Spanish, the British too worried, as they did during the trade to Old Spain, about the possibility of religious conflict or the prospect of Catholic conversions, voluntary or coerced. An early abstract for the South Sea Company charter required the company to employ an Anglican minister for each of their factories and their larger ships.²⁸ These religious men would tend to the souls of those living in the factories, saving them from the temptations of Catholicism. The abstract further required these ministers to learn Spanish or Portuguese, as well as whatever native languages were in use in the area, suggesting that the court of directors could have anticipated some evangelism.

The 1713 contract allowed British individuals like Dover into the Spanish empire in an official capacity as long-term residents. They were permitted to live in the ports, and were to “be regarded and treated as if they were Subjects of the Crown of Spain,” allowed to travel and trade in the colonies, according to the text of the treaty. This display of generosity and trust by the Spanish government was immediately qualified, however, with the stipulation “that there shall not reside in any one of the said Ports of the Indies, more than Four or Six Englishmen.”²⁹ These scattered factors would process the slaves moving through Spanish American ports and would travel into the interior of the continents in order to conduct slaves to other areas for sale.³⁰ In 1724 the company argued further that they should be allowed to send additional agents known as supercargoes to sell the goods of the annual ship throughout the empire, and that those men should be treated as subjects of Spain, just as the company’s factors in the ports were entitled to by the original contract.³¹

The Spanish crown was resistant to these additional encroachments into their territory. The limitation to such a small number of Britons, combined with the insistence that these men conform to Spanish laws and respect Catholicism, suggests that the Spanish worried that their presence would disrupt the smooth running of their empire. By keeping the numbers of troublesome Britons at a minimum, local civil and ecclesiastical officials could expect to repress their potentially negative influence.³²

The contract gave these small numbers of authorized factors permission not only to live in Spanish American ports, but to hold land there. The ninth article of the *asiento* granted Dover and his fellow factors land in the Rio de la Plata area "sufficient to plant, to cultivate, and breed Cattle therein, for the subsistence of the Persons belonging to the *Assiento*, and their Negroes."³³ This situation presupposed that the peace would persist for a long time, long enough for land to be cultivated and crops to be harvested. Given that the Spanish Americas were poor in labor but rich in land area, it is likely that this allowed the Spanish to accommodate the need for provisions at the distant Buenos Aires factory while facilitating the cultivation and settlement of lands that they would not themselves be required to tend. The second part of the ninth article prevented the factors from becoming too comfortable, however, decreeing that houses were to be built of timber only, and that no fortifications were to be permitted.³⁴ Furthermore, a royal officer would be appointed to live on the South Sea Company's land, to observe the activities there and report to Spanish officials as necessary.³⁵ It appears that the Spanish expected British individuals living in the Spanish empire to prove at least a marginal threat, and that they had to be watched, lest the privileges extended to them by the king of Spain result in British fortifications being constructed on vulnerable Spanish territory.

The South Sea Company's trade to the Spanish Americas forced contact between groups that for a long time had been largely officially oppositional in the Americas. While some British merchants, factors, and ambassadors lived within Spain itself during the decades before the British gained the *asiento*, the establishment of the South Sea Company's factories marked the first incorporation of subjects of the British monarch within the borders of the broader Spanish empire as important agents of trade.³⁶ Within the Spanish-controlled regions of the West Indies and South America, an area of continued contest between empires and in which no European power's control was completely consolidated, these factors' presence was both useful and potentially dangerous for the Spanish empire.

Officials in both nations expected that the execution and maintenance of the *asiento* would be bumpy, and they attempted to avoid problems in the text of the treaty. In the twentieth article, the Spanish crown promised to personally ensure that “in case the said Assientists be molested in the Execution and Performance of this Assiento,” legally or otherwise, their troubles would be addressed quickly. This provision to ensure British rights balanced article twenty-two, which explained that all ships entering Spanish ports would be searched, from the top “even to the Ballast,” by the governor and royal officers of that area. In other words, the Spanish expected that their British counterparts would attempt, either systematically or as individuals, to import and sell goods that were declared contraband by previous international laws. Persons found engaging in this sort of trade faced harsh treatment. They were “to pay a Forfeiture proportionable to their Offence, [to be] severely punished, and declared incapable to hold thereafter any Employment in the Service of this Assiento.”³⁷ For its part, the company could be reasonably sure that there would be attempted smuggling of slaves into Spanish American ports by outside traders unauthorized to compete with them. While the French still held the *asiento*, factors, in combination with Spanish officials, were authorized to board others’ ships in order to halt the illegal trade in slaves.³⁸ These provisions during the British *asiento* would ultimately do little to halt the massive contraband trade that grew up in the area, conducted by private traders out of Jamaica and other British territories, by agents of the company itself, and by foreign vessels, particularly the French and Dutch.

The text of the *asiento* treaty created an uneasy alliance between the merchants of the South Sea Company and the port cities of Spanish America. Dover and his fellow factors inhabited a liminal space, in which they were not really Spaniards, but also not treated entirely like other Britons. This would allow some to become integrated into Spanish trade networks more deeply than previous traders to the Spanish coasts while at the same time retaining their British subjecthood and allegiance. This opportunity appealed to many who joined the company’s service. But not everyone in Britain was so sure about the benefits of engaging in trade with such long-term enemies in the vulnerable waters of the Americas.

Debating the Trade

The British gaining access to the *asiento* trade stirred quite a bit of controversy in Britain and Spain alike, and on both sides of the Atlantic. For Spain, the British *asiento* was essentially a forced concession after the War of the Spanish Succession. While they certainly required some foreign contact in order to supply the empire with enslaved laborers, the imperial government recognized that allowing Britons into their territories meant a gradual loss of the monopoly they had attempted to maintain through the early eighteenth century. For those trading to Spanish America, opinions were mixed; merchants in Spain harbored legitimate concerns that the British would take over some of the trade to the Americas, while those subjects living in the Americas sometimes welcomed the opportunity for new merchandise and price competition.³⁹

Even despite the promises of financial benefit to their own country, many in Great Britain did not immediately embrace the establishment of the *asiento* contract. A flood of pamphlets published during consideration of the contract and after its signing reveal extensive objections to Britons' engaging in this type of trade with Spain, to the positioning of British factors in Spanish American ports, and to the amount that engagement with this trade would cost the British government and private individuals alike. These objections indicate not only the fears that Britons had about the Spanish empire and its potential powers in the Old and New Worlds, but also the fears they had of their own abilities to spend themselves into debt, and to embarrass the nation by being unable to control British subjects' conduct or contraband trade abroad. Significantly, Britons, particularly those in the colonies, leveled objections not to the trade in human beings, but rather to the potential damage that any kind of trade would do to the nation.

The objections began while the War of the Spanish Succession was still raging. In a 1711 letter to the earl of Oxford, the future governor of Bermuda, John Pullen, warned that “if it ever comes to that length, that the South Sea Company shall have occasion to send their Servants to reside amongst the Spaniards in America, the utmost Care and Prudence must be employ'd in procuring able Men to send in the beginning, for if the Spaniards should have reason to entertain a despicable Opinion of them, it would be the work of an Age to retrieve it.” The close interaction that the *asiento* would facilitate between British subjects and individuals and officials in the Spanish empire would leave the British Empire particularly vulnerable to international

embarrassments should their representatives fall short in performance or manner. Pullen had very little faith in the proposed British factors, and put forth two further examples of ways in which the nation might suffer in deciding to pursue this trade. First, the merchants would need to provide “exorbitant Bribes” to Spanish officers, “who are true sons of the Horse-Leech.” Second, the arrangement ensured little accountability, and was vulnerable to any dishonesty on the part of factors; the contract gave the company “a great Opportunity to your servants to abuse you,” charging with impunity larger amounts than were actually needed to carry on the trade.⁴⁰

The people of Jamaica immediately resented the possibility of formalizing and monopolizing trade to the Spanish Americas, for a variety of reasons. Some had long been resistant to the idea of peaceful trade with the Spanish; Thomas Modyford, governor of Jamaica from 1664 to 1671, aggressively supported the large buccaneer population based on the island.⁴¹ These pirates, along with the *guardacostas*, employed by the Spanish to retaliate, made shipping to and from the island more dangerous, but did enrich those who seized cargo and specie from Spanish crews.⁴² Some continued to support the quasi-military seizure of Spanish goods, rather than direct trade.

From another perspective, Jamaica’s merchants, many already engaged in a longstanding, albeit often illegal, trade with the Spanish colonies, expected that the South Sea Company would cut off an important source of profit for the island. Trade to the Spanish had long been significant to the island’s commerce. Commercial activity with Spanish territories constituted a considerable amount of Jamaica’s economic development in the late seventeenth century, even before the robust growth of agriculture. The traffic in slaves made up a lot of this trade; the Royal African Company seems to have sold large proportions of its imports of enslaved African laborers to the Spanish during the 1680s.⁴³ In an effort to limit French trade and aid English commerce, after 1704 the English government condoned trade from Jamaica to the Spanish Americas in wartime, provided they did not ship materials meant to support the Spanish war effort, though once the war ended this was no longer permitted due to the South Sea Company’s monopoly.⁴⁴ Despite the dangers of trading to the coast during the contract, ships from Jamaica continued to smuggle slaves into the Spanish coasts through peace and war, some colluding with company agents and some independently. Early in the contract, the Vera Cruz factory complained that a Jamaica sloop had landed on the coast with seventy-three African slaves on board, violating their monopoly.⁴⁵ Decades later, Captain Fayrer Hall explained that the South Sea Company’s activities had damaged the

Jamaican merchants' business.⁴⁶ Throughout the *asiento* period, antimonopolistic interests in Jamaica and the metropole continued to decry the limitations the contract placed on trade, considering the informal trade that had long flourished between the island and the Spanish colonies.⁴⁷

At the beginning of the *asiento* trade, the vast majority of British objections focused on economic troubles. Some objected that engaging in this trade would be too expensive to justify the profits. An anonymous pamphlet by a Jamaica resident, published in London in 1714, advised the company to reduce its costs by cutting the number of factors to just two at each port, with the majority of the business and organization handled in Jamaica, where the company would set up a large factory in any case.⁴⁸ Jamaica's William Wood warned in 1714 that the *asiento* could in no way be more profitable than the trade that was already being carried on—illegally—between Jamaica and Spanish America.⁴⁹ Given the commercial duties that the company would owe, the restrictions placed upon the trade by the Spanish crown, and the possibility for treachery on the part of Spanish officials, it would actually weaken the strategically valuable island of Jamaica and make it more vulnerable to capture by foreign powers, particularly the French.⁵⁰

Further on in the *asiento* period, others objected to the South Sea trade because of the financial issues that it would eventually create. One aspect of the company that was particularly attractive for the British crown was that it took on and restructured a portion of the massive national debt that had accrued as a result of the War of the Spanish Succession. In order to reduce this debt, South Sea Company stock was both sold and exchanged for securities that had previously been issued by the government. The stock became incredibly popular, and rose astronomically in price through early 1720. As with all speculative crazes of this sort, the South Sea bubble eventually burst early in the decade, bankrupting many and turning much public opinion against the company.⁵¹

Other celebrations and rejections of the treaty moved beyond the issue of economics, to the very ideology of empire. The early eighteenth-century British government was deeply divided over the benefits of this project. While the supporters of the Tory government rallied around the idea of expansion in trade and land made possible by the South Sea Company's *asiento*, many Whig thinkers balked at the plan, privileging the added value of people and labor over territorial gains in building the empire. They preferred the Dutch model of extensive trade but minimal settlement, and rejected the idea of taking land by force. Rather than marveling at the mines they might control if only British

forces could seize Potosí and Zacatecas, they feared that such riches would stifle their own empire's productivity and create distinctively Spanish moral dissipation among the people.⁵² At the same time, the South Sea Company might be a particularly easy way to access some Spanish silver through trade, which both sides agreed would benefit the nation.⁵³ This conflict between a model of imperial expansion and national success based on land and one based on trade was not necessarily so dichotomous for some in Britain and particularly on the ground in the Americas; the agents of the South Sea Company would often end up taking the most pragmatic approach to profit, personal, and if convenient, national, rather than considering the ideals being argued in London. While some of those who lived in the West Indies would in later years champion the idea of expanding the British Empire into territories held at the time by the Spanish and even provide crucial strategic information about Spanish lands, those trading to the West Indies before the South Sea Company's monopoly resisted these changes in policy, which would inevitably damage the legal and illegal trade they were already conducting in the region.⁵⁴

Arguments for the trade largely focused on the opportunities it might present, rather than the guaranteed profits. Other European nations had considerable success in the Spanish American trade. One pamphleteer reminded readers of the French accomplishments in the area, which included ships "loaden with the Riches of America, but principally with Gold and Silver."⁵⁵ Undertaking this trade themselves, the author urged, would allow Britain to enrich not only its merchants, but also its manufacturers and farmers. Given the possibilities, and the opportunity to seize this trade from their French rivals, the contract seemed a clear benefit to the nation at many levels.

Among those engaged in the arguments surrounding the South Sea Company, Daniel Defoe wrote particularly passionately, and in addition to encouraging Harley in establishing the company, he acted as a prolific propagandist for the trade. He noted the advantages that commerce with the Spanish Americas provided to the French before and during the war, pointing out that taking over that portion of Spain's trade would weaken the other major Catholic power in the West Indies by depriving it of profits. Long before the crash a decade later, he imagined that the availability of stock would benefit many Britons, just as the trade would be lucrative for the South Sea Company. By establishing areas of trade on the Spanish American coasts, Defoe expected that wealth would flow to Britain, and that new opportunities for selling British manufactures would be opened. He imagined new employment for the poor and for mariners, an increase in land values, and a revival of the

struggling Royal African Company, which for a long time had the official monopoly on the slave trade in West Africa.⁵⁶ In a 1712 pamphlet, he decried the focus of many on the shortcomings of the trade, arguing that the unfortunate restrictions should not be enough to justify abandoning the possibility of a trade that was "well worth all the Hazard, Adventure, Expence, and Pains of the Undertaking." Attention must be given to possible gains rather than limitations, Defoe wrote, "that we may not presently argue our selves out of all the Trade, because we have not the Gates of Mexico opened to us."⁵⁷ If organized correctly, Defoe hoped, English settlements nestled among the Spanish American claims, like the one they had already established at Jamaica, could supply the Spanish Americas without the long-required expensive stop in Cádiz.⁵⁸

A major component of Defoe's excitement over the South Sea Trade, in addition to the profits he anticipated, lay in the possibilities he saw for the establishment of British trading and settlement to expand into other areas of the Spanish empire. As he saw it, the *asiento* would offer a perfect opportunity to "find out or discover some Place or Places in America, where we may fix and settle a British Colony." This implies both the collection of information on the Spanish empire that would suddenly be open to Britons legally trading with and living in the Spanish Americas, and the subsequent opportunity to carve out parts of that empire for British "Planting, Settling, Inhabiting, Spreading, and all that is usual in such cases." Regardless of the technical restrictions on unsanctioned trading between the Spanish and British subjects, Britons' presence would have to be advantageous; "let the English get a good Footing on the South-Sea Coast of America, and let them and the Spaniards alone for Trading with one another, let the King of Spain prevent it if he can."⁵⁹ In contrast to writers like the Secretary of State Lord Bolingbroke, who felt that trade and conquest could not be undertaken at the same time, Defoe saw them as part of the same approach to overseas profit.⁶⁰ England could be expected to thrive even where the Spanish had not been successful, with its North American colonies positioned to support the newly developing settlements.⁶¹ Defoe's extensive publishing in support of establishing a colony in South America, along with the detailed maps of cartographers like Moll, alerted the British public to the possibilities that lay across the Atlantic.⁶² The company's Court of Directors shared these aspirations, in their words, to be able to make both "a trade to and settlement in the South Sea," establishing bases from which English influence and economic advantage could expand.⁶³ Here the aims some Britons had not only to trade with but to settle and control large parts of the Spanish empire, and to take advantage of the productive mines and large

markets in those parts of the Americas, become clear. During subsequent periods of interimperial unrest, Britons with firsthand experience of Spanish America once again championed specific seizures of land, as Lionel Wafer and William Dampier had done in decades past.

Unfortunately for the Court of Directors and stockholders of the South Sea Company, those who opposed the company saw the future more clearly than Defoe. Repeated problems arose in the factories and with the conduct of trade, and the company had ample cause to complain during the tenure of the contract that they were not achieving the profits they expected.⁶⁴ It is likely that the contract most benefited those who engaged in contraband trade under the guise of bringing slaves or goods to the ports or fairs of Spanish America.⁶⁵ Indeed, the opportunity that this officially limited trade to the Spanish Americas provided for Britons to bring contraband into the region was a major reason for some to support the *asiento*.⁶⁶ The nature of the Spanish American ports into which the British South Sea Company factors moved lent itself to both unusual levels of personal contact between members of each empire and opportunities for corruption and smuggling. At the level of individuals, the empires, and their success, became increasingly entwined. During the course of the *asiento*, some Britons would find this closeness to the Spanish tempting, and even challenging to their imperial loyalty. As the nations implemented the agreement laid out in the 1713 treaty, the benefits and dangers of trade became more fully realized.

Implementation

In 1714 Queen Anne authorized two South Sea Company ships to travel to the Spanish Americas. The *Warwick*, captained by Henry Partington, sailed to Buenos Aires with Thomas Dover and his fellow employees on board. Robert Johnson captained the *Anglesea*, bringing Chief Factor Gilbert Grimes and his fellow company agents to Cartagena.⁶⁷ Scandal surrounded the project almost from the start. Johnson reported that he had been asked by Arthur Moore, an agent of Bolingbroke, to stop in Cádiz to collect the viceroy of Peru and the new governor of Panama for transport across the Atlantic. In addition, Moore proposed smuggling a large cargo onboard the *Anglesea*, though when he reported Moore to the court of directors Johnson insisted that he had rejected Moore's plan out of consideration for his own reputation. The Spanish American officials in Cádiz ultimately had to find a different way to travel to the

Americas, and the viceroy, Carmine Caracciolo, the Prince of Santo Buono, spent much of his short administration in Peru working against the sort of contraband traffic Moore was proposing.⁶⁸ In response to Johnson's accusatory letter, the South Sea Company court found that Moore, from his position of power in the company, had "encouraged a design of carrying on a clandestine trade, to the prejudice of this corporation."⁶⁹ Even before agents arrived to establish their factories, individuals at all levels of the company's organization were attempting to take their own advantage of the Spanish American connection, even when it might damage the company's position.

In a less scandalous but still troubling case, Captain Partington wrote to the company repeatedly about the difficulties he faced in having the agents on board; they were, according to him, already trying to circumvent the rules of the court of directors and the treaty. In February of 1715, he reported that the factors came onboard in England according to plan, but that they had brought ten African servants and nine additional white people, including five women, onto the ship, despite the restrictions that the treaty placed on the British presence in the Spanish American ports.⁷⁰ Even with this first foray into Spanish American cities, the factors challenged the limits of the *asiento*, potentially trying the patience of the Spanish. Partington wished to refuse to sail with the additional passengers, but was instructed to proceed, bringing Dover, his fellow factors, and the rest of the Britons first to Madiera and from there to the South American coast.⁷¹

Landing factors in Spanish ports was only the first step in establishing this trade. More complex, the company needed to acquire and deliver enslaved African laborers. The company took a number of approaches to securing a steady supply of slaves for Buenos Aires and the other factories during the *asiento* period. The Royal African Company had held the monopoly on British trade to Africa since 1672; in 1698 it lost its coveted status, and the coast was opened to independent traders.⁷² The members of the Royal African Company responded enthusiastically to the opportunity presented by the creation of the South Sea Company, hoping that an exclusive contract would revive their organization. In August of 1713, committees from the two companies met, and the Royal African Company agreed to supply the total quota of 4,800 slaves per year, even before the South Sea Company had mapped out the locations of their Spanish American factories.⁷³ The Royal African Company's troubles continued, however, and the South Sea Company soon had to turn to other private sources to fulfill its need for slaves, though it did revisit the possibility of a long-term contract with the Royal African Company in

the early 1720s.⁷⁴ In addition to the Royal African Company, independent traders brought slaves directly to the Spanish American coast or to the factory in Jamaica, where they would be redirected to the necessary ports of the Caribbean and South America. Housing and selling these enslaved laborers was then the primary task of the South Sea Company's agents who had themselves recently come to those cities.

On their arrival in the Americas, those factors who had lived most of their lives in Great Britain found an area of intense movement and mixing of peoples. Diverse religious, ethnic, and racial groups already circulated extensively in the West Indies by the time the British began their legal trade to the Spanish.⁷⁵ Creole and Spanish Americans in the port cities of the empire lived alongside native Central and South Americans, African slaves, and individuals of various blended cultural and ethnic backgrounds, who now mixed with British factors, traders, and hangers-on, in addition to the various other Europeans who legally, or at times illegally but openly, moved through the area as merchants.⁷⁶ Lands periodically changed hands, as with Jamaica in 1655 and St. Kitts in 1713. The proximity of a number of European empires, and the periodic native and slave resistance that flared up in the area, made it difficult for any one nation to consolidate power.

For those reasons, the Caribbean was unusually dynamic and largely dissimilar to contested lands in Europe. While the movement of peoples and shifting of geographic control in the West Indies mirrored the conflict and movement that occurred in disputed European areas such as Gibraltar, and the intermixing of people for the reasons of trade was not unlike that which had long occurred in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean's New World situation and the opportunities it offered for mining and trade made it a unique location for European disputes.⁷⁷ Europeans had settled their territories heavily, and control over the lands there was established in some cases by centuries of treaty and international recognition. The Americas, having been divided by the European powers relatively recently, and containing lands that were still to be discovered, offered far more opportunity for the expansion of European monarchs' control over lands than attempts made on the European continent. Alliances with native peoples or signatures on European treaties could allow Spanish or British settlers to lay claim to American land, and to benefit from the attendant gold or silver, native labor, natural resources, and trading potential. This shifting of sometimes very weak control, coupled with the high stakes represented by control over the richest trading opportunities to the New World, made the Caribbean an unusual area of mixing and conflict.



Figure 2. Map of the locations of the South Sea Company's factories. Despite restrictions on non-Spanish residents in the colonies, the company was officially allowed to station a small number of agents at each of its factories. Map by Darin Grauberger, University of Kansas Cartographic Services.

The West Indian and Spanish American ports in which these British factors lived were also very different from the British ports, including London, to which many of them were accustomed. In places like Jamaica, Cartagena, Buenos Aires, Panama, and Portobello, the employees of the South Sea Company encountered a hugely diverse group of people, unfamiliar terrain, and an inhospitable climate like none in Europe. Some men adapted well to these new conditions and stayed for years, while others either returned home quickly or succumbed to illness in the tropical or subtropical heat.⁷⁸

Dover and his company arrived into this context of cosmopolitanism and uncertainty when they reached the port of Buenos Aires in the summer of 1715. Partington held the ship off the coast for several months, guarding the factors against external dangers while they established themselves on shore.⁷⁹ While in Buenos Aires Partington reported that several of his crew had died since coming into the Rio de la Plata area, including his cook and boatswain, presumably from subtropical diseases.⁸⁰ The city's location on the southern Atlantic coast put them far from the other company factories, but close to a major source of Spanish wealth. Merchants from Buenos Aires, both British and Spanish, could trade nearly directly to Potosí, the great mountain of silver in Bolivia, despite official rules mandating that that trade occur only through Lima. Buenos Aires was one of the most important cities in the Spanish Atlantic empire when the factors arrived, and in the middle of doubling its population, which rose to nearly nine thousand within the decade. This economically vital region stood on the edge of the empire, in an agriculturally rich area sometimes raided by native groups living on the frontier.⁸¹ The port was of particular importance to the South Sea Company; in the later part of the contract period, the company would be allowed to send groups of several hundred slaves inland, to Chile, Bolivia, and Peru, giving them access to a huge area of the Spanish Americas.⁸² In the time after enslaved laborers' arrival on company or independent ships and before willing buyers could be found, the agents housed them on various farms and estates. The factory, far from British supply routes, provided its own food with its farm near the river.⁸³

In Jamaica, where the factors sometimes paused en route to their respective ports of employ and where the main South Sea Company factory conducted much of the trade, some new arrivals had a first introduction to their new life. Jamaica had a large enslaved population, and small proportion of Europeans compared to Great Britain.⁸⁴ Here individuals of different races came into regular contact. Both slaves and indigenous individuals from other

islands and the mainland migrated to Jamaica, and slaves purchased by the company were often brought to the island for "refreshment" before continuing on to Spanish America.⁸⁵ In addition to its demographic diversity, Jamaica's economy integrated closely into the multi-imperial Caribbean system of commerce, exporting the produce of its plantations and importing manufactured goods and European foods. Internally, Europeans in Jamaica relied on Spanish coins for their day-to-day exchanges.⁸⁶

If the physical heat and human company in Jamaica seemed strange and perhaps unwelcome, the Spanish American ports proved more removed still from a European way of life. In Cartagena, where the *Anglesea* deposited its group of factors, the majority of inhabitants belonged to indigenous groups. Traveling to the area in 1735, Antonio de Ulloa described the country as not particularly wealthy, but home to a number of "splendidly furnished" houses and rich men. Cartagena, about the size of a third-tier European city, lay on the edge of the water, supplied from the east, where "several fruitful valleys" and largely depleted gold mines stretched for many leagues.⁸⁷ The South Sea Company factors traveling to Cartagena aboard the *Anglesea* could expect to meet several distinctive castes of people, from *peninsulares* born within Spain to a wide number of individuals of mixed parentage. Ulloa, himself Spanish, spoke highly of the men and women he met in Cartagena, who he felt "possessed a great deal of wit and penetration." Though they appeared sluggish and possessed a "wan and livid complexion," they were quite healthy, Ulloa assured readers.⁸⁸ But the very foreign geography and population doubtless shocked some of the merchants.

Cartagena was placed strategically, in a location that allowed it to protect possessions on the Spanish Main, but under the Hapsburgs it had become an undersupplied place of disorder. While the empire prohibited most foreign trade, the people of Cartagena threatened rebellion if their access to foreign flour was restricted.⁸⁹ Early in the century, the judges of the city overthrew and imprisoned the president and captain general over similar differences.⁹⁰ The Bourbons responded to this disorder with a series of reforms in 1717 that included the creation of the viceroyalty of New Granada and a reassignment of the American trade to Cádiz rather than Seville.⁹¹ This attempt at a reassertion of imperial power was a reflection in part of the variety of interests at play in the colony and the metropole, a situation that the South Sea Company and its individual agents would sometimes exploit to their own advantage.

Factors inhabiting another key strategic site in the empire at Portobello

found themselves on the eastern side of the Isthmus of Panama, a three-day journey over land from the port of Panama.⁹² Ulloa described these cities as substantially similar to Cartagena, though Portobello was particularly infamous for its inclement weather.⁹³ Some expressed concerns that the British factors sent to the area might be at particular risk for catching infections “among the Spaniards,” given the unhealthy climate.⁹⁴ Portobello had poor soil and few provisions; its main value was as a gateway to Panama and the rest of South America from the Atlantic Ocean.⁹⁵ For two centuries, Panama was one terminus of the *carrera de Indias*, a sailing of fleets of ships between Spain and the Americas, convoys meant to secure the Spanish monopoly on their trade and to protect their cargoes.⁹⁶

For a few weeks each year, as the fleet arrived, Portobello would fill up for the annual trading fair. Vessels crowded the harbor, huge numbers of mules laden with the gold of Peru milled about the town, and tents were erected for the display and sale of goods. More than half a century earlier, the English traveler Thomas Gage described having seen “heaps of silver wedges [that] lay like heaps of stone in the street,” and imagined that this was the greatest fair in all the world. The sheer quantity of wealth that congregated in the city attracted merchants and smugglers who engaged in a robust contraband trade through and around the fair, despite repeated attempts by the crown to keep all trade visible and taxable. The *asiento* permitted the company to send one “permission ship” of five hundred tons each year, a significant penetration into the Spanish American market that no other country had managed. In addition to this allowed amount, Ulloa reported that by sailing with separate ships for the crews’ provisions and by reloading from still other ships, the factors were able to bring almost twice that load of merchandise into the city. At the 1721 fair, the English ship the *Royal George* received goods from more than twenty other English ships, significantly driving down prices among the other merchants as the Spanish government had feared when they first attempted to limit the British to one five-hundred-ton ship. In addition, factors could smuggle merchandise on shore from their regular ships by claiming that the goods were meant for the maintenance of the slaves. This smuggling comprised a significant and critical part of the Caribbean economy, and was warmly accepted by local colonists, given the inability of the Spanish to otherwise supply all the needs of their colonies.⁹⁷ Given the usual restriction of travel to the annual fair only to subjects of Spain, the British were as enthusiastic about this unprecedented access to the Spanish empire and its markets as the Spanish were nervous about what this British incursion on Spanish

trade monopolies and movement in Spanish American lands might mean for their control of large areas of the Americas.

The factories these Britons inhabited in the New World were not only places of business through which the trade in slaves and goods flowed, but also the factors' own homes. Factors inhabited mid-sized buildings near large warehouses meant to store goods and provisions, and structures to hold slaves until they were sold. The factory at Veracruz had a kitchen well stocked enough to suggest that the factors often had company; they had more than eighteen pewter plates, twelve stools, and several chairs, plenty for the four to six factors and either British or Spanish guests. Marble and mahogany tables filled a common living area, and mirrors hung on the walls. The factors surrounded themselves with shelves of books in English. Their bedrooms held chests full of clothing, and each employee had an English cot to sleep on. A chiming clock kept the factory's occupants on schedule.⁹⁸

The *asiento* allowed a maximum of four to six British factors to reside at each port to facilitate the sale of slaves coming into Spanish American lands on British ships. In order to run smoothly, a factory needed at least one or two factors working on slave sales and perhaps traveling into the interior with groups of slaves, as well as a bookkeeper and a surgeon; the latter would tend both the South Sea Company employees and the African men and women moving through the port after their voyage through the middle passage.⁹⁹ In addition to this permanent group, British supercargoes attended the ships that came into these ports with the slaves and goods that supplied the factories, and often stayed in these ports for several months.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, from the incomplete records of the South Sea Company it appears that there were often many more British subjects living in and around the factories and traveling through the Spanish Americas than the Spanish officially sanctioned. Factors sometimes invited their own British servants to work in the factories alongside the many Spanish servants that they hired. Even British musicians traveled through the Spanish Americas, entertaining Britons and Spanish officials alike.¹⁰¹

Though much of the correspondence sent from the Spanish American factories to the company's directors in London has been lost, some copies of the instructions sent from the court of directors to the company's factors have survived, containing suggestions about the difficulties these factors faced in establishing their factories and the expectations the court and the nation had for the company's activities abroad. These letters show that from early on the South Sea Company experienced problems with controlling

their factors abroad. Issues of language, conduct, and contact arose several times.

The court of directors hoped that some degree of contact would be beneficial to those who supported the idea of taking over Spanish lands directly. In a series of long letters providing instructions to the factors on how to structure their correspondence, the directors included an entire section titled "Concerning the Laws and Customs of the Country." There, they instructed factors to "give us an Account not only of the Government of Veracruz and Mexico, but all other places you can get information, where we may have any trade, or through which our goods or negroes are to pass . . . or any thing else that might affect our commerce."¹⁰² Although the company sought information about Spanish American markets to maximize commercial efficiency and reap profits, it also demonstrated a wider curiosity about the Spanish American empire. In many ways, this interest in collecting information about the Spanish empire echoes Defoe's concern for finding and settling productive and trade-ready areas of the Spanish empire. Collecting information about the areas that the Spanish had already subjected and to various extents settled could position the British Empire well to eventually expand into Spanish territories. Dover wrote to the Prince of Wales directly, offering "a plan of this city & river with the best description I can get of these parts," which would likely be useful in the case of a British invasion.¹⁰³ He also sent along a sample of a kind of local tea, a small reminder of the riches, both botanical and mineral, to be had in South America.¹⁰⁴

The South Sea Company's court of directors expected that its factors would learn to speak the Spanish language fluently. The court reminded the Veracruz factors that Spanish was "necessary for your managing our affairs." The court admonished its employees, scolding them that they had not yet advised the company of the progress that each employee was making with the language; it is possible that they neglected both their language learning and their duties to keep their superiors in London apprised of their lack of progress.¹⁰⁵ Many factors joined the company's ranks without having already learned Spanish, making this repeated instruction necessary. This linguistic knowledge held importance for the company, which was made clear in the stress some individuals placed on their proficiency in petitions for employment or advancement. A petition from Elizabeth Davidson on behalf of her son's promotion explains that her son spent more than five years in the West Indies, less than two of them in the service of the company, "to get Master of the Spanish language, which he now speaks, Reads, and Writes" fluently.¹⁰⁶

The company could not take for granted that its employees would be able to communicate with their Spanish counterparts.

While repeated instructions to the factors to learn the Spanish language might indicate that they were not interacting with the inhabitants of these port cities extensively enough, later instructions to the American factories suggest they might have been having—and enjoying—too much interaction with these Spanish subjects for the comfort of the British company. Some made close Spanish friends, many through a shared interest in revelry, trade, or natural science. Dover and some other company physicians corresponded heavily with prominent British men of science like James Petiver and Hans Sloane, sending specimens and observations from Spanish American shores for their collections. Petiver encouraged factors to make Spanish Jesuit contacts, as that religious order had a well-known proclivity for scientific pursuits.¹⁰⁷

Even when factors did not purposefully set out to make Spanish contacts, they did employ Spanish servants, who may have lived in or near these factories. The presence of these servants and the dinners that the factories would host for local officials meant that all the British factors regularly came into contact with Spanish subjects, as masters, equals, and subordinates.¹⁰⁸ It appears that the court of directors feared that this constant interaction with the Spanish, along with the dearth of British women in the Spanish Americas, would lead to unacceptable pairings. They wrote to the Veracruz factory, "We conceive it very inconvenient for our service, that any of you should marry any of the natives or other inhabitants of America, lest by that means our effects under your management should be hazarded." Beyond being a threat to the company's goods, marriage to Catholics could threaten the factors' souls. The employees were instructed that if any one of them chose to marry Spanish women, "or depart from the Protestant religion, the rest are to take our effects out of his or their hands, and dismiss him or them from our service."¹⁰⁹ In 1723 the factory at Cuba had just such a case, and the court of directors instructed the other factors to relieve a Mr. Walsh of his duties, as he "is married to a native of that Island, and is a Roman Catholick himself."¹¹⁰

The instructions provided to the factors of the South Sea Company, and the dismay of the court of directors on discovering a Roman Catholic in their employ, reveal the simultaneous desire for positive relationships between the British and Spanish for trading purposes and the fear of contamination and blurring of identities that might occur in such close contact with the opposing empire. While interactions had long happened between British

merchants and the residents of Spanish port cities such as Seville and later Cádiz, in the Americas this contact could be particularly damaging, as it occurred geographically far from the center of the empire and could lead to the transfer of critical knowledge about an empire's resources and defenses to a potential future enemy. Factors could expect to interact with the Spanish, but the court of directors cautioned them not to become too close. The very proximity required to create long-term, profitable trade endangered both sides of the commerce; as individuals became closer, and trade relationships intensified, the opportunity for fractures in these relationships to disrupt international relations grew. This in turn endangered those individuals and interest groups most deeply involved in the interimperial trade.

While the instructions sent to the South Sea Company's factors said a great deal about the Spanish, and contained detailed explanations of how they were to proceed with the importation and trading of slaves as merchandise, they said almost nothing about the interaction that factors were to have with slaves as human individuals. These documents do not reflect on the shared experience of mastery common to the British and Spanish, which shaped the development of their empires. Despite this omission in the official correspondence, the constant presence of African slaves and their interactions with British and Spanish colonists at both the individual and imperial levels could not fail to influence the formation of Anglo-Spanish relationships and the situation in the West Indies. As slave populations grew in both empires, the threat of slave insurrection, together with smaller-scale and more individual acts of resistance, would repeatedly challenge European hegemony in the Americas. This, together with external troubles, would shake the British and Spanish empires throughout the course of the trade.

Trouble Begins

Very early during the *asiento* period, the South Sea Company encountered problems with the complexities of the logistics of a massive interimperial organization such as that authorized by the *asiento*. Finding and organizing factors to travel abroad took the Court of Directors a significant amount of time. Though the trade was scheduled to begin immediately in 1713, the Court sent factors to Panama and Cartagena only by late 1714.¹¹¹ Factors were not dispatched for Veracruz until months later.¹¹² Once they arrived in the New World, some encountered further problems with local officials. When

the British factors arrived at Portobello, the Royal Hacienda ministers objected that, because the peace was not yet proclaimed in the area, the contract was not valid. Only the president of Panama's insistence that the factors be allowed to enter and begin their business kept them from being stranded outside of Portobello until the arrival of a ship with royal orders.¹¹³ In April 1715 the Spanish king issued official commands that allowed the assigned factors to enter his kingdoms in order to conduct their business.¹¹⁴

As these factors set out on their assignments, the first of many British ships sailed to bring supplies and slaves to their new bases of operation in Spanish American ports. The *Bedford* and the *Elizabeth*, British men of war on loan from the crown to the company, sailed in 1715 for Cartagena and Portobello, carrying both legal and excess goods. The Spanish king sent word not to hinder the ships in their business and to allow them to freely leave the ports, though he prohibited them from selling more than the treaty-allotted five to six hundred tons of merchandise.¹¹⁵ The annual permission ships did not depart as quickly, as problems within the company led to a delay of the first of these until late in 1716. This, at least, did not improve much as trade continued. That ship, the *Royal Prince*, was one of only seven annual permission ships to travel between Great Britain and the shores of Spanish America during the course of the *asiento*.¹¹⁶ This was only the beginning of the troubles Britain would face in implementing the contract, including both internal problems within the company and international conflicts that delayed ships and interrupted trade often during the *asiento* period.

British traders, both those working for the South Sea Company and for private interests trading in the West Indies, immediately began overstepping the bounds of the trade outlined in the treaty. The *asiento* contract prohibited British ships from trading any goods to the Spanish Americas except in the case of the annual permission ship. The factors quickly found ways to circumvent these rules. Ships traveling to the ports of Spanish America with slaves would also bring flour and other goods, ostensibly as supplies for the factories, but in fact in such large quantities that they were actually intended for sale. The South Sea Company managed to supply the substantial flour market in Cartagena and elsewhere, to the detriment of merchants from inside the Spanish empire.¹¹⁷ In 1715, James Pym, a Cartagena factor, shipped illegal goods on the permission ship the *Bedford* on his own account, bribing local officials to allow him to land his cargo. While initially the Spanish government seized the majority of merchandise from the ship, noting that its weight far exceeded the five hundred tons allowed in the treaty, over a year

later a Madrid court ruled in the company's favor.¹¹⁸ Individual traders unaffiliated with the Company also continued to sail illegally to the Spanish coast.

In order to guarantee adherence to the restrictions established in the *asiento* treaty, Spanish vessels began stopping British ships in the area, to search them and at times seize crews and merchandise, regardless of the actual contents of the ships. In addition, the Spanish king sent officers to the Americas that he hoped would be particularly harsh on contrabandists.¹¹⁹ As early as 1715 the governor of Jamaica, Archibald Hamilton, wrote to Secretary of State James Stanhope of the disheartening situation for Jamaican merchants, that "Many of our trading vessels have of late been attacked & taken by Spaniards, pretending to have commissions for guarding the coast, whereby our merchants are so discouraged that I look on our trade to Cartagena and Porto Bello to be now entirely over."¹²⁰ Some confusion existed as to which of the Spanish ships were *guardacostas* authorized by the government and which were simply pirates claiming that name without any governmental permission. Only a few months after the first complaint, Hamilton was compelled to write again, alerting the secretary to the "frequent . . . robberys & hostilities committed on the subjects of his Britanick Majesty . . . by Spanish Vessels said to have commissions for guarding their coasts."¹²¹ The British government replied by authorizing Jamaican settlers to launch their own ships in order to capture the pirates. Shares of the vessels captured by these British ships or recaptured from the Spanish would be divided among the owners of the ship and those that captured it.¹²²

The illegal detention and seizure of ships was not a Spanish project alone. The Spanish in the Caribbean complained of both the British ships authorized by the king to sail from Jamaica in order to recapture goods and ships taken by the Spanish, and the many unauthorized British vessels that continued to attack Spanish ships unprovoked long after the conclusion of the Peace of Utrecht.¹²³ Even Hamilton, in his letter complaining about the depredations of the Spanish, conceded that "restitution ought to be made to the subjects of his Catholick Majesty, for their losses sustained by hostilities committed on them by the subjects of his Brittanick Majesty since the first suspension of arms."¹²⁴ British ships could not continue to pursue unauthorized Spanish prizes if the peace and the valuable *asiento* treaty were to be maintained between the kings of Spain and Britain. Both British and Spanish empires were finding it difficult to curb the actions of subjects who were for so long accustomed to disliking and doing damage to those affiliated with the opposing empire.

Those living in the area found the striking contrast between the legal peace and the situation on the ground (and on the water) in the West Indies quite evident. Colonel Peter Heywood of the British forces wrote to the governor of Havana in 1716, noting the gap between official policy and enactment. Both sides, he observed, acted unjustly and contrary to the orders of their respective crowns. In fact, wrote Heywood, referring to the unjust taking of several English ships in the area of Trinidad and Cuba, "their majestys subjects here in the Indies seem to be at open war . . . whilst there is so perfect a union and good understanding at home which must certainly reflect on their respective governours to avoid which I wish your excellency would take such measures as [will] put a stop to all such illegal proceedings hereafter."¹²⁵ Any "understanding" on paper did not translate seamlessly into "understanding" among groups in the West Indies. In many ways, the Peace of Utrecht created a convenient fiction that the subjects of Britain and Spain were sudden friends, an attempt to overcome the years of conflict and continuing theft of goods and ships through agreements made in Europe. Despite these attempts, enmity persisted between these two groups.

The stuttering progress of the trade—the movement of slaves through Jamaica and Barbados en route to the Spanish settlements, yet the persistent interruption of this traffic—brought complaints from the free inhabitants of those islands. Certainly the unreliability of shipping caused problems for both the supply of the island and the merchants and investors who lived there. Jamaican residents observed that the move to crack down on piracy caused a panic among the sailors, many of whom, Jamaican Thomas Onslow explained, felt pushed into the illegal activity. Complaints sprang too from the effects that the legal portions of this trade had on the Jamaican economy. The price of slaves went up due to the company's control of large portions of the trade, and the movement of goods from Jamaica to New Spain had "ruin'd all commerce" in the eyes of many Jamaican planters and traders. While smuggling might certainly continue from the Jamaican coast, the South Sea Company trade opened up the possibility of shipping goods directly from Britain, removing Jamaica from the equation altogether. Previously, the French, Portuguese, and Spanish *asiento* holders had relied heavily on Jamaica for slaves and supplies, but with a direct link to the metropole, the company was not so dependent on the island. Many of the planters and sailors who lived in Jamaica were leaving. They contributed much of the money made on the island to the economy of Great Britain in the form of remittances, and they needed security. As the Spanish periodically became more

aggressive toward Jamaica, the dangerous conditions in the West Indies kept many from engaging in their normal trade; indeed, Onslow informed the secretary, "The Spaniards &c watch us so, that there is no stirring in safety out of the island."¹²⁶ The increased interaction with the Spanish, instigated by the establishment of the *asiento*, created considerable discomfort among many of the British colonists and merchants in the region and made the treaty widely unpopular in Jamaica.

The Jamaican case illuminates the large variety of hopes and expectations for empire among British subjects, and makes clear the ways in which shifts in the organization of empire could leave some who profited from previous iterations without opportunity. Various groups held interests, sometimes in harmony but often competing, in the establishment of empire, and in the *asiento* project. These groups included the crowns of Britain and Spain, the South Sea Company, merchants and planters in Jamaica, merchants in Liverpool, Bristol, and London, local Spanish American officials, South Sea Company factors, and Spanish colonists among others.¹²⁷ The wealth of some Jamaican merchants during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century arose from the proximity of a massive rival empire, the Spanish, to which they could trade clandestinely or at times legally. Their success arose from their access to the goods and ships of the English empire, which the Spanish could not directly tap into. Once the British Empire became stronger in the area and exercised its right to monopoly, however, the benefits of being British diminished for those who had long engaged in the interimperial trade. As empire became more efficient, it also became less useful to certain interest groups. At the same time, this very opportunity to hold a monopoly on what they largely intended to be a new trade stood at the center of the South Sea Company and its agents' excitement in moving into the area. Once factors had spent significant time in the Spanish Americas, they would form their own ideas of how their position within the British and Spanish empires could benefit their own interests. As with the Jamaica merchants, these interests would not always be in line with larger imperial hopes for expansion in trade, land, and population.

Renegotiating the *Asiento*

In response to the difficulties of the early trade, the Spanish and British crowns agreed to negotiate once again. George Bubb Doddington, the envoy

to Spain from the British court, laid before the Spanish ministers the many difficulties that the company and its agents had faced during the early years of the trade, and secured some concessions in a new treaty signed May 27, 1716. This agreement maintained many of the stipulations established by the original asiento treaty of 1713. Bubb's main concerns, addressed in the 1716 revisions, were the chronological terms of the treaty, the variability of the annual fairs, and the sometimes inevitable transfer of excess goods to the West Indies. Bubb himself had not supported the original treaty, and resented having to do the company's bidding in bettering their position, especially given the frustrations of working in Philip V's court. He complained repeatedly to Stanhope, then secretary of state, that he had always considered "the assiento as an affair that we could never be gainers by" and that "the Assiento business puts me entirely beyond all temper."¹²⁸ Even with these misgivings, Bubb successfully renegotiated the treaty, taking into account the difficulties of the early trade.

The British South Sea Company had gotten off to a slow start with the late departures of the factors to Veracruz, Cartagena, and Panama. Concerned that this delay would not allow them to enjoy the entire thirty-year term of the asiento, the company appealed to the Spanish king, who agreed that both the payments due from the company to the crown and the first permission to send both slaves and an annual ship could be shifted to the first of May, 1714.¹²⁹ Philip V required the company to pay the fees that accumulated for the first two years in 1716 in return for this extension of the treaty. With the assurance that they would be able to take full advantage of the trade, the factors could go about establishing themselves in Spanish America more firmly.

The original asiento treaty had granted the British the sudden and exciting ability to trade their manufactured goods and the products of their empire directly to the Spanish American market. The annual permission ships of five hundred tons were to travel to the trade fair at Portobello each year, carrying merchandise that would supply the colonies of South and Central America and fill the purses of British merchants. The British almost immediately encountered problems with this arrangement, however; the "annual" trade fair was far from being a yearly event, and often the British vessel had no indication of when or if the fair would happen before departing London. Recognizing this difficulty, the Spanish king agreed that a fair would be held each year in his American domains, and that he would advise the company annually as to when the Spanish galleons, or *flota*, planned to depart from Cádiz for the relevant port. If the Spanish ships had not left by June, the

British would be allowed to sail alone, but would be required to wait in the Spanish American port for up to four months. When the Spanish galleons arrived, or when four months had passed, the British were permitted to sell their goods to the Spanish American traders who flocked from as far away as present-day Peru and Mexico in order to purchase European goods.¹³⁰

The more frequent trade in slaves conducted by the South Sea Company posed its own problems for the exact fulfillment of the 1713 version of the *asiento* treaty. This early iteration of the agreement prohibited the British from bringing any trade goods into the Spanish Americas apart from those transported on the annual permission ship. The vicissitudes of the slave trade, subject to supply and demand, made this particularly difficult, according to the company's merchants. Company or private ships traveled to the coast of Africa, carrying goods to trade in exchange for slaves; however, the rates of exchange were not constant, and the ships could easily leave the African coast with some of the trade goods they had originally expected to need in purchasing enslaved laborers. The company's supercargoes argued that if they could not bring these goods with them to the Spanish American ports, they would be forced to throw them into the sea at a great loss. Though the Spanish crown insisted that the company not be allowed to sell these excess goods, they were to be allowed to transport this cargo to the Indies and deposit it in the royal storehouses, to be secured by keys held by the royal officials of the port and a representative of the company.¹³¹

The willingness of the Spanish and British governments to come to a mutually acceptable agreement demonstrates both the continued attractiveness of the trade for these countries, especially the British, and the persistent hope for the interimperial diplomacy and cooperation that allowed the signing of the treaty in 1713. While the company accomplished little in the first three years of the period in terms of actual trade, in this time they did establish their factors in functioning factories, begin the process of trading both goods and slaves to the Spanish Americas, and cooperate with the Spanish government in rewriting parts of the original treaty in order to facilitate the continuation of the trade.

But all was not well. Despite the clarifications provided by Bubb's treaty of 1716, the two empires continued to contest the interpretation of certain aspects of the *asiento* contract. The company complained that it was being hindered in its attempts to bring slaves into the interior for sale. John Pitt, resident in New Spain, was forced to move to Vera Cruz, having been told by the local Spanish government that only junior factors were allowed to travel

inland to deliver groups of slaves. Some members of the local governments in the Spanish Americas appear to have objected also to the time supercargoes spent in the ports while their goods were sold, pointing to the eleventh article of the *asiento* as evidence that no more than six Britons were allowed to inhabit a city at any one time. In fact, in 1723 the Spanish king issued a special *cedula* that specified that the supercargoes aboard the annual ship the *Royal Prince* had permission to conduct their business in the port. The company, concerned about the potential future detention and punishment of these supercargoes, hoped that King Philip would provide a blanket authorization for these men, and "that the supracargoe by the annual ships, shall be treated as his Cath.o Majtys own subjects, as is provided in behalf of the factors for the negro trade" in the *asiento* contract.¹³²

Even as these agreements were reached, the company continued to draw the negative attention of some Spanish religious officials. The Inquisition made careful note of the actions and movements of South Sea Company employees, whose Protestantism might taint the monolithic Catholicism these representatives of the Church were attempting to impose upon the Spanish and slaves alike. Though local secular governments did not seem as concerned with these religious questions, the Inquisition courts maintained some power to influence the presence of Protestants. In 1716, the Cartagena factors heard from the Inquisition courts that they were to reduce their presence, as the eight Britons living in the city exceeded the number permitted in the treaties.¹³³ Factors posed a threat to Spanish Catholicism; Spanish Catholicism posed a threat to factors as well. As they began to settle into their new cities, whatever their numbers, these merchants formed connections with Spanish subjects, traders, and officials that could shift their own loyalties away from the empire that their supporters hoped they would enrich and enlarge. Cooperation between Britain and Spain at the beginning of the *asiento* period created compromises with which some on both sides remained uneasy.

Thomas Dover spent only a short time in Spanish America as an employee of the South Sea Company. In August of 1716 the court of directors voted to recall Dover, possibly as a result of his illicit private trade; like many company employees, Dover found it difficult to resist taking advantage of Spanish trade needs for his own benefit, as well as the nation's.¹³⁴ The directors voted to replace Dover with a Mr. Thrupp, whose former position as a merchant in Old Spain and excellent command of the language won him the majority.¹³⁵

The Buenos Aires factory continued its development under Thrupp. It was not until several years after the factory was first established that the Spanish king directed the local governor to apportion lands for the Britons to cultivate in order to support themselves and the slaves moving through the area. At this point the court of directors also instructed the factors to raise the price of slaves, feeling they were sufficiently established to demand payment upfront and begin remitting silver to the metropole.¹³⁶

The conflicting interests within the British and Spanish empires continued to disagree about the advisability of the *asiento* trade through the rocky first years of its implementation. The opportunities posed by the trade for empires and individuals on both sides overcame the wariness of detractors, and the move toward trade rather than conquest, though incomplete, fundamentally changed the relationships between the merchants of these empires. By 1716, the trade had begun in earnest. It would not be long until two wars shook the peace.

CHAPTER 2

The Stuttering Success of the Early Trade, 1717–1728

As the provisions of Bubb's treaty created new expectations for trade, the South Sea Company's factors went about the business of establishing themselves in their new cities. Trade depended on finding mutual interests with members of the oppositional empire, and many of the company's employees wasted little time in identifying Spaniards with whom they could socialize and make deals, based on a mutual interest in science or profit. Despite this enthusiasm among some, the company's operations faced challenges during the next decade as trade disagreements, smuggling, piracy, and two resulting wars shook the fragile peace between the empires. The wars of the mid-asiento period affirmed the dangers that lay at the heart of the trade. Those Britons who were closest to the Spanish, socially and economically, ran the greatest personal risk when the nations quarreled. At the same time, these individuals, working for their own interests as well as Britain's, collected a great deal of information on both empires, posing a potential danger to each.

The South Sea Company had established its agents in the port cities of the Spanish empire in the hope that these men would direct all their energies toward benefiting the company and, by extension, the nation's pocketbook, given the company's role in assuming the national debt and providing outlets for British manufacturing. Many of the factors, however, entered the company's service with their own agendas and expectations. Company employees, among them the physician John Burnet, took advantage of their location in the Spanish Americas in order to satisfy their own curiosity about the natural world, and circulated the information that they obtained within the Spanish empire widely. They also collected information about trade, fortifications, and wealth on both sides of the imperial borders. Some engaged in extensive extralegal

trade, and others spent a good deal of their leisure time attending to their own interests, economic or intellectual. The interests that brought members of the British and Spanish empires together, including trade and exploration for scientific and other aims, would also lead to just the issues that would disrupt the peace at the highest levels of government. When members of these empires worked together, as in the collection of scientific information and specimens or transporting contraband goods, they could become close. They might, as in the case of Burnet, reject their loyalty to their home empire if the opposing empire offered a more attractive situation. A look at Burnet's time in the company's employ reveals the many possibilities for international correspondence and friendship open to servants of the company, as well as the dangers inherent in these interactions for individuals and empires alike.

Burnet completed his training as a doctor at the University of Edinburgh sometime shortly before or during the first years of the *asiento*. His interest in plants, minerals, and medicines sufficiently impressed the botanist James Petiver that he recommended the young surgeon to the company for employment. Petiver no doubt hoped that Burnet would continue to add to his extensive collection of tropical curiosities if he could travel through these previously largely inaccessible lands.¹ By August 1716 he had made enough of an impression on the court of directors that they chose him to be the company's physician at Portobello.² Although he came to the South Sea Company as a surgeon, his aspirations went far beyond simply providing medicine and care to those moving through the Spanish American ports. In many of his letters to his contacts in Great Britain, Burnet expressed his desire for more power, including a will to rise within the company and become a factor in his own right. Frustrated with the unresponsiveness of the court of directors to his demands, Burnet often complained that his considerable talents were wasted in his present position. The court would eventually come to recognize Burnet's value in the *asiento* trade, but as the trade underwent fluctuations in times of interimperial tension, his deep resentment would in the end prove more powerful than their praise.

Burnet's years in the company were marked by interimperial turmoil, and the trade proceeded in fits and starts. Though the vagaries of the peace process and the difficulties of transatlantic relocation had created disruptions at the start of the *asiento* period, Burnet and his fellow employees soon got the trade underway, beginning to fulfill Spanish American port cities' demands for slaves and illegal merchandise. While merchants on both sides of the imperial divide eagerly pursued the newly opened opportunities, bringing profit to

themselves and sometimes their countries, international troubles persisted, and at times flared. During the period from the enactment of Bubb's 1716 treaty to the late 1720s, interimperial conflict twice put a stop to the *asiento* trade in the Caribbean and the Spanish Americas. South Sea Company agents faced imprisonment or ejection from their factories, holds full of suddenly undeliverable cargo rotted in idle merchant ships, and British and Spanish goods and crews caught on the wrong side of the line during the war faced seizure and worse. War damaged South Sea Company interests, but the presence of Britons in the Spanish Americas both legally and illegally sometimes sparked the tensions that would lead to a break in the interimperial peace.

Trade Under Bubb's Treaty

The British and Spanish shared some compelling mutual interests—the Spanish needed slaves imported from Africa to the Spanish Americas and the British wished to profit from the imports—but the trade was more difficult in practice than in theory. Imperial disagreements, driven in part by the trade irregularities and the seizure of ships and cargo in response to contraband trade, as well as piracy, resulted in two inter-imperial wars during the first two decades of the *asiento* period, wars that temporarily halted trade and made the ultimate fate of the treaty and long-term peace uncertain. Despite these wars, however, as the trade grew and stabilized, British trade networks expanded into new areas of the Spanish Americas, bringing Protestants into contact with more Spanish Catholic subjects, in pursuit of profitable trade. The British were most enthusiastic about the opportunity for shipping merchandise directly to the Spanish. However, the Spanish resisted the South Sea Company's attempt to take advantage of its newly reiterated rights to an annual permission ship to the fair at Portobello, and complained about the weight of the ships that were sent. The new treaty allowed the company to ship six hundred and fifty tons rather than the former limit of five hundred for a one-decade period, in order to compensate for losses incurred during the first years of the *asiento*. However, different methods of measurement among the British and Spanish, along with British smuggling, led to Spanish complaints in 1717 that the *Royal Prince* exceeded this limit by several tons.³ When the same ship returned five years later, it clandestinely brought more than double the five hundred tons initially allowed to the eager Spanish market.⁴ Furthermore, despite the promises reaffirmed in the 1716 treaty, on the

verge of war in June 1718 the court of directors received word from Spain that they should not send cargo to the Portobello fair that year, as plenty of merchandise already crowded warehouses in the Spanish colonies.⁵ This meant disappointment for some British merchants, though those living in Spanish America were already busy making connections in order to conduct their own illicit trade.

Throughout the *asiento* period, the Spanish government in Madrid made efforts to curb the irregularities of trade in their American colonies and close gaps into which British merchants could bring their wares, an early iteration of the Bourbon reforms. In particular, the Spanish shifted power over the American trade from Seville to Cádiz in 1717. The king also created the Vice-royalty of New Granada that year, sending a representative, Antonio de Pedrosa y Guerrero, tasked with regulating trade in an area with a deeply corrupt local government. Despite these efforts the first viceroy, Jorge de Vilalonga, had a hand firmly in the local contraband trade, even structuring legal trade in order to reduce competition.⁶ These kinds of self-interested Spanish officials offered an opportunity for South Sea Company agents and independent British traders to move deeply into Spanish American economies and to take advantage of Spanish Americans' need for goods and slaves, through both legal and illegal markets. When the Italian chief minister of Spain, Giulio Alberoni, began his reforms, the South Sea Company sought to curry friendship with him, sending him a gold watch.⁷ The sometimes conflicting interests of the Spanish royal government and local imperial governments, as well as the immense physical distance between the metropole and these outposts, led to difficulties in running the empire. Those involved in the monopoly of the company, as well as individuals operating within the significant contraband trade that accompanied this sanctioned contact, were able to make personal profit from the expansion of the British Empire, expand overall British power in the area, meet the needs of some local Spanish concerns, and do damage to Spain's policies overseas.

While the South Sea Company trade had barely gotten underway when the War of the Quadruple Alliance began, the company already made a significant difference in the commercial activities of one angry British interest group: Jamaican planters. The trade in slaves to the Spanish Americas had, they continued to complain, resulted in a poor quantity and selection of enslaved laborers for those on the British island. Further, the availability of abundant labor for the Spanish allowed the people of Cuba and other areas to expand their sugar production, putting the Spanish in direct competition with

Jamaica's own sugar plantations and mills.⁸ The inability of Britons to keep peace with the Spanish was also troubling; Britons living in Jamaica worried about their proximity to the Spanish empire as the war progressed. Jamaican resident James Daniel wrote in the *Jamaica Courant*, the only newspaper in publication on the island at the time, that though he did not have "any advice of an intended invasion directly upon us . . . we have intelligence that the Spaniards are equipping and arming many ships and vessels . . . which ought to alarm us so far as to be upon our guard."⁹ The South Sea Company and its agents grasped at profits, real and potential, at the expense of Jamaican planters and merchants.¹⁰ Jamaicans' early fears about the possible outcomes of the creation of the company's monopoly had begun to be realized.

Individual instances of contraband trade and attempts at its suppression, while beneficial to some British and Spanish individuals, challenged Anglo-Spanish peace while tensions within Europe reverberated through the American colonies. In 1717 the situation in the West Indies appeared dire. Even the powers' willingness to compromise in signing the 1716 treaty could not stem the tide of animosity that was rising in the Caribbean and between the powers more generally. In 1718 the brief and rarely studied War of the Quadruple Alliance shook the peace between the nations both in the colonies and on the European continent. The war prevented the South Sea Company from bringing slaves and goods into Spanish American ports until 1722, when peace resumed, and demonstrated the fragility of the agreement between Britain and Spain when tested in the West Indies and the Spanish Main, an area so far from the centers of imperial control and so hotly contested and desired by both nations.

War of the Quadruple Alliance

The Treaty of Utrecht had not solved all the issues of European nations from the War of the Spanish Succession. The Quadruple Alliance of England, France, the Dutch Republic, and Austria wanted additional territorial concessions that Spain was unwilling to provide.¹¹ The resulting war, sparked by this territorial conflict in Europe but with repercussions an ocean away, officially began late in 1718. In early December, the British king ordered reprisals, or seizures of the king of Spain's subjects and goods as compensation for British losses, permitting Britons with the appropriate paperwork to conduct privateering voyages against Spain and seize Spanish goods in the Americas.¹² Declaring war, George I explained that "It would be endless to enumerate the

Complaints of Our Subjects relating to the infractions of Treaties, the Breach of ancient and established Privileges, and the unwarrantable Obstructions of their accustomed Trade and Commerce.” Britons complained that the Spanish ignored established treaties, seizing men, goods, and ships in the Spanish Americas in peacetime. Further, King George insisted, his Spanish counterpart began the conflict, having attacked first, leaving Britons in the West Indies safe on neither sea nor land. The king offered some comfort to those Spaniards living within the British Empire, promising that those Spanish subjects who transferred their allegiance would not be harmed, an acknowledgement of the presence of men moving between the empires.¹³

The tension over trade had been salient from the beginning of the *asiento* period, and as war became inevitable members of both empires took advantage of the opportunity not only to trade clandestinely in new ways but also to commit acts of violence and robbery against subjects of the opposing crown. Despite the peace they enjoyed at the beginning of the year, in 1718 Britons such as George Shelvocke sailed against the Spanish because of the promise of profit it offered. To avoid difficulties with the British national government, some secured commissions from other European powers such as the Dutch, who did not shy away from authorizing attacks on Spanish vessels.¹⁴ An unscrupulous subset of Britons preferred to profit from the Spanish through privateering rather than trade, and thus welcomed conflict. Others, settled in the West Indies, hoped for a quick resolution to the fighting, which endangered their trade, homes, and survival. Each of the many possible forms of empire, at peace or at war, appealed to different groups of Britons and Spaniards depending on their individual economic and social interests. As such, the war provoked a number of responses from those with an interest in empire, including the South Sea Company’s supporters and those who abhorred the monopoly.

The people of Jamaica faced particular difficulties at the beginning of the 1718 war. With crumbling military defenses, and insufficient residents, resources, and preparation, Jamaicans could not hope to repel any sort of concentrated attack on the key trading island. A speech reproduced in the *Jamaica Courant* warned the local council of the colony’s weakness at the beginning of the war, advising them that “the rock line and the decay’d fort of castle-bay is worthy your immediate consideration.” The orator further encouraged them to consider implementing martial law, though the council ultimately rejected that measure.¹⁵ Jamaica’s precarious fortifications and agitated populace caused real concern for the British Empire. The island’s position in the Caribbean made it a crucial location for trade to the wider

Americas, and if the Spanish were successful in recapturing their lost prize they might be able to deny the British access to most of the trade to the Caribbean and the American continents.

Jamaica's merchants inhabited a very vulnerable position within the empire, located geographically close to islands controlled by the Spanish. While this was beneficial in previous times of peace, allowing for a robust if not entirely legal trade to the Spanish Main and surrounding islands, it also meant that they lay immediately next to Spanish shipping lanes. For this reason, Britons trading from Jamaica faced recurring threats from Spanish vessels, some of which had authorization from the Spanish crown to take British ships if the Spanish seized them in the midst of illegal trade. In 1716, Laurence Van Huesslan, a twenty-eight-year-old mariner bound from Jamaica on a ship called *Port Royal*, testified that he had been aboard a ship taken by the Spanish ship *Marquedore*, fired upon, and terrorized. The English captain died of wounds incurred while defending the ship. The Spanish captain, according to Van Huesslan, tortured one of the mariners, "claping the Jaws of the Cock of a Firelock upon his Tongue, to make him confess that the said Sloop was bound to Rio de la Hacha," a trespass that would permit the Spanish to detain the British cargo. The Spanish then brought the crew of the *Port Royal* to Cartagena as prisoners, where the governor held them for a period of four months and threatened to condemn them. While Van Huesslan lived to return to Jamaica and tell his tale, the goods aboard the *Port Royal* remained forever lost by the British, who were understandably worried about the security of their shipping.¹⁶ Concerns such as this spurred the wave of anti-Spanish feeling throughout the British colonies that would demand an answer in the wars of the decade and a half that followed.

Some on the island took the opportunity of the war to argue for a renewal of the private trade from Jamaica, in wartime and otherwise. From Port Royal, Jamaican collector John Kelly lamented in 1719 that the conflict, far from legally restoring the private trade from Jamaica, as was hoped before the outbreak of hostilities, was in fact more damaging to trade than the South Sea Company's monopoly. Calling for freer trade rather than the restoration of the monopoly, he noted that because of the vastly superior manufacturing capacity of Britain, it was to the empire's benefit "to have her manufactures exchanged for money which drains the Spaniard, of the sinews of war at the same time that it enriches Great Britain."¹⁷ The larger portion of the trade to the Spanish Americas Britain could command, this suggests, the greater advantage Britain would have over the Spanish and the rest of the European powers in the West

Indies. Having been damaged by the new imperial policy that limited the Jamaica trade, Kelly and others in Jamaica urged the restoration of a less regulated British empire in which they could make their own profits.¹⁸

While Jamaicans suffered economically and feared for the island's safety during the war, the South Sea Company and those Britons who lived closest to the Spanish in their cities were at greatest individual risk when the tenuous peace between Spain and Britain temporarily broke. Burnet and his fellow company agents living in the Spanish Americas soon felt the impact. In response to the declaration of war, in March 1719 the governor of Buenos Aires initiated the first wave of retaliations for wartime crimes committed by Britons, called *represalias* or reprisals by the Spanish, against the company in that city. He ordered that South Sea Company goods be confiscated, with the justification that he had found silver in their possession, contrary to law. He called for anyone with information on the South Sea Company or any Englishmen to report to him. Despite a previous agreement that the company would have eighteen months to settle any affairs before being treated as enemies in times of war, their effects were widely seized in the ports.¹⁹ In this as well as later reprisals, South Sea Company agents feared losing their freedom and livelihoods.

Danger certainly loomed for the Spanish as well in American lands. Some Britons with American interests, temporarily released from the need to treat the Spanish as friends and valued trading partners, turned once again to the possibility of dismantling and absorbing the Spanish empire piecemeal. This plotting was greatly supported by the information gathered by Britons before and during the *asiento* period about the Spanish holdings. In 1719, a *Weekly Journal* article poked fun at British enthusiasms for land, noting that they expected any day “a most flaming Proposal from the South Sea Company” for creating a colony on *terra firma*, costing huge amounts of money and providing trade that rivaled that of the Portuguese in Brazil.²⁰ Having allowed British subjects into their lands for extended periods, the Spanish could find crucial information about their empire in British hands and the enthusiasm for this land greatly increased.

Throughout this period, interested Britons could peruse a variety of printed maps that demonstrated the many ways the empire's merchants, navy, and privateers might take Spanish silver and lands. Whatever Britons hoped to do with their empire—smuggling, taking over land, or simply conducting the legal trade—cartographers provided useful information. Publishers reprinted “A Map of the West Indies,” compiled by cartographer Herman Moll, several times from its original during the *asiento* period.²¹ Moll not only

detailed the coasts of North and South America and the islands of the Caribbean, but also indicated the routes of the treasure fleets and where ships' provisions might be had. Alongside the coasts the map includes insets, with smaller drawings of the most important cities and bays in the area. These provided information that might benefit either merchants or an invading army, depending on the circumstances of the day; the inset for Havana included a note about "a high tower where is always watch kept, to see if any ships are coming from sea," a warning to enterprising smugglers or conquering attackers. Drawing on information from previous cartographers, English sailors, and the increased circulation of knowledge about the Spanish Americas made possible by the presence of South Sea Company factors and ships, Moll created a kind of invitation to the area, one that made the potential for trade, or the possibilities for seizing the land itself, clear to all.

Initial plans to take over Spanish lands focused on those areas in which the British had not only maps, but extensive firsthand experience. Early in the war, forces from Jamaica attempted to seize the Bay of Campeche on the Yucatan peninsula. Kelly praised the Bay as "of the highest importance to the King's colonies, and to his revenue, if it be considered what great consumption of British manufacture, as well of the produce of ye plantations what a number of men and shipping it will employ which will in a great measure prevent ye further growth of piracy," linking his concern for trade with the overall good of the island.²² The English had been engaged in the logwood trade in Campeche and in the Bay of Honduras since the mid-seventeenth century, importing at times £60,000 per year in dyewood, but the Spanish expelled the logwood cutters in 1717. The Jamaica Assembly, already nervous about the limits on trade from the island created by the South Sea Company monopoly, pointed to the South Sea Company as the true reason for the loss of that trade. They observed that the Spanish, who found the British too numerous to remove previously, were pushed into the action by the company as a way to end smuggling by Britons unaffiliated with their business.²³ If Campeche could be recaptured by Britain before the peace was reestablished, it would be much easier to claim it in the resulting treaty, and it could be used as both a new market for British goods and products and a place of employment for otherwise idle British sailors and merchants. Though the British national government did not support a push for Spanish American lands until the major war in 1739, the attraction and possibility of taking over these areas continued to appear in correspondence and pamphlets throughout the *asiento* period, especially in times of interimperial tension.²⁴



Figure 3. Herman Moll, *A Map of the West-Indies or the Islands of America in the North Sea*, 1708–1720. Moll's map gives British readers a view of the lands that they could profit from in the West Indies, including insets of several Spanish American ports. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Knowledge of Spanish American lands could be valuable in a number of ways. In wartime, it could lead to smuggling or invasion; in peace, individuals looking out for their own interests could find more creative ways to gain from knowledge of these lands. This included those who were interested in the natural world, and others who found that one country might compensate someone handsomely for information about the other.

Connections and Curiosity Across Empires

Throughout the periods of war and peace, South Sea Company factors needed to determine the best way to live in this new and sometimes hostile area. While trade flourished, men like John Burnet formed friendships with Spanish individuals, which allowed them both a social outlet and the opportunity to trade in their new environment. Some found common areas of interest with their Spanish hosts, especially in the realm of the natural sciences. These affinities to Spanish subjects, lands, and sometimes even institutions made living outside of the areas controlled by their own empire easier for these Britons. But with the opportunity for reward came risk. Between the possibility of being caught up in one of the repeated wars between Britain and Spain and becoming too attached to the Spanish, the South Sea Company's employees occupied a position that could alternately be dangerous for themselves and for the company. Just as curiosity could facilitate trade and interpersonal connections, in times of war, individuals might use this information against the opposing empire, or even against their own.

Few Britons were more eager to avail themselves of their presence in Spanish America than Burnet. During the wars, the Spanish stripped the factories in *represalias*, and in concern, those South Sea Company agents who were able retreated to Jamaica or beyond. After the interruption of the War of the Quadruple Alliance, Burnet moved on from his former post in Portobello to the Cartagena factory as the peace resumed.²⁵ As quickly as he was back in the company's employ, he petitioned to go beyond his official role as an agent of the *asiento*, taking advantage of his location in a new way. In 1722 he asked to be sent on a journey throughout the Spanish Americas, "making what observation I am capable of both with respect to trade & commerce & with respect to the Naturall History of these Countreys."²⁶ An eager student of natural science, he hoped to enrich his country and himself through discovery. Denied by the court of directors, he remained at the factory, though his

resentment grew. A year later he argued that becoming a factor upon the death of one of his companions at Cartagena was his “due & birthright.” He dismissed arguments that he should not be a factor because he wasn’t “bred to merchants” with a phrase that recurs in his letters: “It does not follow that a man who is born in a stable should be a horse.”²⁷ Burnet continued in his role as factory physician as trade resumed and even flourished between the British and the Spanish Americas.

Though he was at first unsuccessful in his bids to the court of directors to improve his station, Burnet found ample opportunity to distract himself during his time in Cartagena, when not called upon to attend sick slaves or factors. He was interested less in business than in the natural world. He took the opportunity of being in the West Indies to increase his understanding of natural science. As a scientific observer within the Spanish empire, which had previously been largely unexplored by Britons, he provided a particularly valuable resource for naturalists. Burnet corresponded extensively with men of science such as the later president of the Royal Society of London, Hans Sloane.²⁸ Beginning very early in his employment with the company, Burnet appealed to Sloane to intercede on his behalf with the court of directors, complaining that he would not receive any payment until he arrived at Portobello.²⁹ Burnet hoped Sloane could act both as a scientific colleague and a possible ally in dealing with the businessmen in London. In addition to the requests for help in collecting his pay, Burnet sent Sloane astronomical and natural observations and specimens, and asked in return for books and scientific instruments that would help him to better understand and describe the new and different world he was encountering on the Spanish Main. Sloane’s own opinions of Burnet remain unexpressed in his surviving letters.

Colonial travelers from the very edges of the British imperial presence sent home scientific reports that provided a critical basis for much of the work of categorization and classification going on in metropolitan organizations. Members of the Royal Society of London corresponded widely, and the agents of the South Sea Company inhabited a particularly enticing position on the edges (and at times, the interior) of South America, where they had access to new and possibly beneficial plants, heretofore uncollected animals, and unknown diseases. Due to their unusual freedom of movement, many in the South Sea Company made contributions to natural science.³⁰ Major collectors of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries like Sloane and Petiver received letters from and made requests of sailors, merchants, and settlers throughout the American colonies. This exchange allowed colonial

correspondents the opportunity to expand their knowledge and to stake a claim for their scholarly interest and competence, even far from the salons of London.³¹

From the factory in Cartagena, Burnet joined the many men of science interested in exploring the lands claimed by Spain. The South Sea Company proved a valuable resource for those Britons who wished to make journeys of scientific discovery, either as company agents or independent movers. As the trustees for the newly formed colony of Georgia began to send out feelers for plants and animals that might bring profit to their investors, South Sea Company agents agreed to assist Dr. Robert Millar, who was sent south in order to collect botanical specimens, planning to travel to Veracruz and beyond in search of cochineal and other natural resources.³² He replaced the deceased Dr. William Houstoun, himself a former South Sea Company surgeon aboard slave ships and an accomplished botanist. The trustees dispatched Millar in an effort to fulfill one of the colony's original purposes, to supply semitropical goods to Great Britain. Entering the country with official Spanish permission to travel, Millar found that he was unable to travel far at all, being constantly under surveillance. The Spanish impeded his movements, and ultimately sent him to Havana, and eventually on to England.³³ He reported to the Georgia trustees that the only possibility for collecting information about the country would be through those South Sea Company agents already allowed residence in the area, making men like Burnet all the more valuable.³⁴

The new world provided much to occupy the time of those interested in scientific pursuits.³⁵ Burnet continued his collection and categorization of natural curiosities throughout his time in the West Indies, gradually growing more adventurous in his attempts to send specimens back home. In 1722 he wrote a long letter to Sloane including information on the medicines available in the area, and alerting him that he intended to send him a previously requested taxidermied sloth.³⁶ Burnet collected knowledge about the natural world that could be useful to the British not only for its own sake, but also as a source of information about areas they might eventually take over for themselves. By sending his observations back to Great Britain, Burnet both hoped to impress the members of the Royal Society and provided, intentionally or not, help to British merchants in gaining greater control over Caribbean lands.³⁷ Knowing the animals and plants (especially plant-based medications) available in a given locale would make the choice of potential British targets and exploitation of resources easier, and would in the meantime

provide information about the situation of the Spanish in these potentially lucrative places.³⁸

Burnet's widely ranging interests and connections brought him into conversation with a larger scientific community in the English-speaking world and beyond. He sent observations through his correspondence with Sloane that were intended for Sir Edmond Halley and expected a response from the prominent astronomer. He sent specimens to Petiver, though Petiver's death in 1718 put an end to that correspondence early in the *asiento* period. He also met an Italian chemical experimenter living in Cartagena who collected specimens of natural and medically useful curiosities, and asked that Sloane send "moss of mans scull" in order to complete the man's collection.³⁹ His connection to the wider world of Atlantic medicine also extended to his interest in smallpox inoculation, a controversial topic that was hotly debated in widespread areas of British influence from New England to London to the African coast only recently.⁴⁰ Burnet observed that a boy who suffered from a local disease called *Mal de San Lazaro* also contracted smallpox. Observing the amelioration of symptoms following from the comorbidity of the two diseases, he wondered "whither inoculateing the small pox on the Lazarens would not prove a cure?"⁴¹

Burnet's investigations into Spanish American natural history were extremely productive. Beginning on his voyage to the port of Buenos Aires, Burnet collected and gathered information about the flora and fauna of the Spanish empire in America, sending Sloane a "box of gumatous extract" from local trees.⁴² An inventory of curiosities he sent to Europe suggests the wide and sometimes morbid scope of his interests, as well as the availability of the bodies of slaves as objects of research; "an abortive Negroe; three polipus taken out of the heartts of two negroes. Two fishes . . . a root called *raize rouge* said to be good in fluxes; the bill of a fish taken out of a shark's belly almost dissolved . . . the shell of an ostrage egg from Buenos Ayres."⁴³ Any of these might provide new information to curiosity-seekers and thinkers eager to learn about the Americas, their nature, and the best methods of exploiting them. Burnet's accounts of his collections suggest that he was gleaning at least some of his knowledge of the natural world from African and native informants who had contact with the climate and surroundings of greater duration and in greater depth than an English trader could hope for himself.⁴⁴

As a member of an international scientific community, as well as out of personal interest, Burnet interacted widely with educated men who were also

Spanish subjects, forming close friendships with some. In a 1722 letter to Sloane, he reported that he spoke to “a very ingenious gentleman a Spaniard in this town who is a mathematician & engineer to the King” who promised to share his extensive astronomical observations with Burnet. After the gentleman copied out the observations in Latin, Burnet would send them to Sloane, and request a number of instruments, such as a “Circulo or quadrant with a pendulum And its spy glasses for observing the sun & stars.”⁴⁵ He privileged his interest in scientific knowledge over British fears that contact with Catholics would lead to contamination, as he had an extended correspondence with a Franciscan Father at Santa Fe, who, he gushed, “has promised me every thing curious which that country affords, & which I shall transmitt to you as soon as come to hand.”⁴⁶ Friendliness with the Spanish might lead to individual profit or opportunities otherwise closed to curious Britons.

Burnet’s connections with the Spanish extended beyond his intense interest in science to close daily contact. As a South Sea Company employee, he had ample opportunity to interact with Spanish merchants and officials in the course of his duties. His correspondence suggests that he did not limit his relationships with these Spanish subjects to short or cursory visits in which information and merchandise could be exchanged. In 1724 Burnet reported in a letter to Sloane that “one of the *oidores* of Charcas lives in the house with me & has introduced me to most of their acquaintances,” though given the man’s high status in Spanish society, this may have been an attempt by Burnet to play up their connection.⁴⁷ Building relationships with a number of Spanish individuals opened up for Burnet a new group of possible contacts and friends beyond the few British merchants also living in the factory. At the same time, his reach beyond his official company business sometimes threatened the position of the company in the Spanish empire.

Burnet’s refusal to adhere to his employers’ rules nearly led to his dismissal from the company’s service. In 1723, the court of directors complained to the factors at Buenos Aires that they had received reports that Burnet had brought his wife, daughters, and servants to Cartagena, noting that “it is contrary to our intentions and may be the occasion of embarrassing our affairs.”⁴⁸ Burnet’s transgression not only went against the orders of the company, but violated the terms of the *asiento* treaty, jeopardizing the agreement between the empires. Despite Burnet’s serious disobedience, in a letter written the following year the directors changed their approach, eager to take advantage of the connections he had built outside of the official trade. They were “pleased

to hear there is one among them that has got the Esteem of the Spaniards, we mean Dr. Burnet, who you write as capable of doing the Company a signal service." Because of his value to the company, he would be allowed to keep his family with him in Cartagena, in the hopes that "this Indulgence will animate + stir him up the more to exert himself for our interest."⁴⁹ The court of directors recognized that Burnet's connections with Spanish merchants and officials could be valuable to the economic pursuits of the company, and smooth the way in the West Indies for continued peaceful trade. A tension arose here even in the interests of the company; they needed factors who could become close to the Spanish in order to facilitate trade, but those who became too close and flouted the rules posed a threat.

Trade and Trouble

A different sort of threat resulted from British and Spanish individuals unaffiliated with the company. As the company continued to develop its trade, pirates of many nations took the opportunity of the interimperial trade and the richly laden ships it produced to make their own fortunes. Pirates from both empires took advantage too of the troubles between the nations, and the chance to place blame for illegal behavior with a sometimes enemy group.

The minor wars that shook New World trade and European politics created gaps in the official importation of enslaved Africans into the Spanish ports, but the numbers brought in during this ten-year period remained significant. During the years 1717 to 1728, according to some calculations, the major ports of Spanish America received more than two hundred ships and nearly 28,000 slaves from British South Sea Company vessels in peacetime.⁵⁰ In addition to these legally imported slaves, a thriving contraband trade continued, with slaves and merchandise being brought to the Spanish empire by British, Spanish, and other merchants in ways that have not been accurately or systematically detailed in the historical record due to the limited accounts kept by those engaged in illegal enterprises.⁵¹ Given the hopes with which many Britons entered the *asiento* trade, these legal trade figures, which fell significantly below projections, disappointed the court of directors and its investors. Coupled with the lucrative illicit trade, though, this treaty was quite profitable for some individual Britons, and the crucial aspects of the treaty, the projection of hope for opportunities to make money from Spanish lands, remained.

Following the 1716 treaty and after the 1718 war, trade in the West Indies slowly became more serious and organized. The enslaved Africans legally brought into the Spanish empire on British ships during the 1717–1728 period entered through a number of Spanish ports, the largest of which were Panama, Portobello, and Cartagena on the northern coast of South America and Buenos Aires on the Atlantic coast far to the south. The company bought slaves where they could, sometimes from West Indian islands, but later moved to attempting to consistently buy slaves directly from the African coasts at the request of the Spanish.⁵² Factors who had barely established themselves before the war moved back to their factories or into new ones, meeting new Spanish subjects and beginning to form both economic and social relationships.

As the factors flooded back into their homes and warehouses, they restarted a trade that some in Britain expected would create new opportunities for other investors. The Royal African Company, which lost its monopoly on the slave trade on the African coast in 1698, hoped that it might have more success in supplying the Spanish American slave market than it had at the beginning of the *asiento* period, and began once again to load its ships for Caribbean and South American ports.⁵³ More money poured into the African trade in the excitement of investors caught up in the fervor of the company; in the two years after the peace, the Royal African Company managed to ship a total of over 3,000 slaves to the American coasts, an improvement over their numbers in the previous decade but still far short of the treaty-mandated 4,800 slaves per year.⁵⁴ Ultimately, the Spanish American trade made little difference to the foundering fortunes of the Royal African Company.

This peace was marred a bit for those in the South Sea Company by the financial disaster caused in London by the bursting stock bubble. The company absorbed large amounts of the national debt, which was converted into stock, its price inflated, in order to make the company a profit. These stocks became incredibly popular for speculators, with prices rising astronomically into 1720, part of a general interest in stock schemes. When this bubble inevitably burst, and the price of the stock dropped, investors, many important figures in British politics among them, faced catastrophic losses. Robert Knight, the company's treasurer, fled the country after having been questioned by Parliament on his abuses within the company, which included falsifying records, bribery, and illegal sales of stock. Knight, along with many other members of the court of directors, was responsible for flagrant

misdeeds by the company during the years before the stock collapse, and his disregard for the needs of the country as compared to himself and, when it benefited him, the company, demonstrated the significant difference that could exist in interests between the court of directors and the crown.⁵⁵

Despite this financial scandal in Great Britain, in the colonies, the South Sea Company continued to operate. At the same time that trade began to re-develop and company agents moved back into their factories, impediments to trade and other cross-imperial projects became evident. In 1721 Shelvocke, during his voyage around the world, cruised the West Indies. A Spanish governor alerted him that the War of the Quadruple Alliance had come to an end, but the message was delayed because of the language barrier. He wrote to the Spanish governor, "I could not fully understand your letter for want of a sufficient interpreter of the Spanish language; but from a farther consideration, and the best interpretation I can get of it, I understand you to say there is a treaty of peace between their Britannick and Catholick Majesties."⁵⁶ He went on to ask for provisions, if the two empires were in fact friends once again. While Shelvocke was eventually able to determine the content of the Spanish governor's letter, it is clear that any nuance in communication between members of these empires would be largely lost in the absence of more competent translators.

Barriers to peace more insidious than language differences shook the Anglo-Spanish relationship more than once during the following decade. Piracy in various forms interrupted the trade of all European nations in the Americas for half a century, becoming particularly problematic after the empires no longer had consistent work for privateers and released these sailors and captains into the seas on their own accounts. In the later decades of the *asiento* period, problems with piracy in particular would spark a war that would definitively end the peaceful trade between Britain and Spain. In trying times, Britons who were once crucial to expanding the empire as sailors on privateering, navy, or merchant ships could damage it greatly by pursuing their own interests.

The complaints about both Spanish and British piracy that litter the records of the 1717–1728 period come as no surprise, given historians' characterization of the period from 1650 to 1730 as the "golden age of piracy."⁵⁷ As the Atlantic economy grew and as trading among the various European powers in the New World developed during the peace in the wake of the War of the Spanish Succession, piracy became an increasingly attractive option for people coming into the West Indies from throughout the Atlantic world.⁵⁸

Engaging in piracy could open opportunities for spectacular profits, for revenge against certain empires or legal regimes, and even act as a means to alleviate boredom in times when traditional forms of trading became slow.

Piracy presented a major roadblock to Anglo-Spanish peace and to the conduct of any kind of trade in the Caribbean. The actual identification of individual interactions between ships as acts of piracy is, however, much more complex than it may at first seem, in an area simultaneously being constructed by so many different national, imperial, and extralegal groups. Both privateers and pirates seized ships and cargo in the Caribbean during the *asiento* period, and sometimes-overzealous *guardacostas*, the coast guard authorized by the Spanish government, detained suspected smugglers. *Guardacosta* ships, sometimes official armada vessels but more often ships sourced locally and dispatched by colonial governors, legitimately patrolled in the West Indies, looking for British ships that had ignored the rules of the *asiento* treaty by carrying illegal goods, though the British suspected that many claimed to be *guardacostas* while actually acting as independent pirates.⁵⁹ In 1724 the Spanish king found it necessary to issue orders reinforcing the sections of the treaty that forbade the English ships to carry gold or silver that did not come directly from the slave trade, and from transporting Spanish subjects out of their colonies.⁶⁰ The nature of any particular seizure of a ship might be contested, depending on the context, in interimperial communications or in courts of law as the British accused some Spaniards of seizing cargoes without cause or authorization, and the outcome of any acts of supposed piracy could have real consequences for relations between these empires.

Pirates arose both among the Spanish and from the ranks of Britain's own sailors. In 1718 the king sent warships to Jamaica as protection against pirates of undefined origins, who were becoming particularly "numerous and insolent" on the island's coasts. But piratical threats were internal as well. These British crews were conducting trade among the Spanish, the Jamaicans complained, reducing employment for the island's sailors: "our seafaring men wanting their usual employ are the easier seduc'd to turn pyrates."⁶¹ Clearly, many Britons were not interested in building an empire that would benefit the metropole at their own expense.

Britons also leveled accusations against the Spanish for driving their sailors to this desperate, illegal activity, claiming that their own mariners became pirates only because they were so put upon by Spanish attacks. One Jamaican pamphleteer insisted that those sailors who were employed as privateers

during the War of the Spanish Succession had “cheerfully” become merchant seamen after the peace. Only after harassment by Spanish ships, being repeatedly taken and deprived of their goods, did they turn to piracy as a means of supporting their families and taking revenge against the Spanish. The sailors’ willingness to plunder ships of any nation, the author explains, came later, as the result of the governor of Jamaica’s general declaration against pirates, which prompted them to make “no manner of distinction” among nations.⁶² Piratical attacks on Spanish shipping in a time of official peace, fed by the cycle of smuggling and retribution, repeatedly threatened to destroy the South Sea Company trade by inciting further inter-imperial conflict. The Spanish response, in authorizing *guardacostas* to harass the British, could lead to further war.

Attempts to suppress piracy disrupted activities in Jamaica and the expenses incurred by trying pirates in court began to put stress on the coffers of the already cash-strapped island.⁶³ The British colonies aggressively pursued pirates, seeking to both punish and dissuade them throughout the English-speaking world, hoping that pirates of British, Spanish, and other various origins would fade away from the Caribbean trade if adequately frightened. Limiting the activity of pirates was crucial if the countries were to maintain good relations in the West Indies.⁶⁴ In 1720, a court of admiralty held at Jamaica brought charges against thirteen pirates, including John Rackam and the infamous female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read, in one two-week period. These men and women faced accusations that their activities on the seas were contrary to British laws created during the reign of William III, and their trial occasioned Parliament’s creation of new and stronger laws against the piracy that so often disrupted the smooth transfer of goods and specie to and from the Spanish empire as well as between Britain’s own American colonies.⁶⁵

Pirates captured in the Caribbean demonstrated their clear understanding of the political and economic climate in which they committed their crimes, and attempted to use this knowledge to defend themselves from the accusations of the British admiralty. A summary of the Rackam case reprinted in Jamaica the following year reported that the accused, given the opportunity to present their defense, declared “that they had no witnesses, that they had never committed any Acts of Piracy, That their design was against the Spaniards, and other such-like Frivolous and trifling excuses.”⁶⁶ The disdain for these “excuses” that the printer expressed suggests that few would believe these rationalizations, but the mention of the Spanish in the

explanation indicates that the pirates expected some leniency if the court were to accept their claim that they acted solely against the Spanish empire.⁶⁷ The issue of what allies, if any, accused pirates had was complicated by the claims that the accused made, the flags they flew, and the intense mixing of people of different racial and ethnic groups on board pirate ships. During the Rackam trial, a mariner named Thomas Spenlow testified about the pirate attack on his own schooner in June of 1719. The pirates hoisted a Spanish flag in order to confuse their prey.⁶⁸ Pirates and other sailors could hope to take advantage of the Caribbean as an area of imperial contact and overlap to exploit the differences between the empires for their own gain, but in this case, the failure of the anti-Spanish explanation had dire consequences for the accused. Over one weekend, the admiralty executed the eleven male pirates. All were hanged, and the bodies of three, including Captain Rackam, were brought to prominent places on the island, and “hung on gibbets in chains, for a publick example, and to terrify others from such-like evil practices.”⁶⁹ Those ghoulish remains demonstrated that the British government, through local administrators, had much more immediate methods than the passage of legislation to deploy against piracy in the Caribbean colonies.

Pirates captured in the West Indies could capitalize not only on who they claimed to be stealing *from*, as in the case of the men tried with Rackam at Jamaica, but on confusion about who they might be working *for*. Officials sometimes found it quite difficult to determine whether crews charged with piracy were acting for their individual interests or with the blessings of their country’s government. The ambiguity made the assignment of blame for piratical depredations a complicated proposition, one open to influence based on the interests of the government and the company, who needed to restrict piracy and contraband in order to maximize profits. In a journal of his expedition to the governor of Havana, a British captain named Dennis gives an account of his conversation with the governor about the problem of piracy in the area. He defends the British approach, assuring the governor that any British subjects who were caught as pirates were hanged, “so that if English pyrates robbed the Spaniards, that’s not to be laid to the account of the nation.”⁷⁰ Britain could not be held responsible for the illicit actions of its subjects, and pirates should not be seen as acting with the crown’s approval. This distinction was especially important given the tensions that remained between the two empires, and the profits that might be lost by continued violent conflict between them. While some Britons dismissed Rackam’s crew’s claims that they were sailing against the Spanish, it appears that the Spanish

government took the problem of British pirates quite seriously. The Spanish took at least outward pains to make sure that in times of peace, those who seized British ships were capturing legitimate prizes that were engaged in smuggling, rather than ships legally trading to the Spanish empire.⁷¹ The appearance of legality, regardless of the complaints of those British captains whose ships were seized because of alleged contraband goods, was crucial to maintaining the Spanish empire's moral position as the wronged party in the eventuality of peace negotiations in the future.

The presence of Spanish *guardacostas* and the British privateers meant to counteract them had been a problem from the very first years of the *asiento*. During the period after Bubb's treaty, on both sides these depredations (or defenses of empire, depending on the side defining them) continued and expanded. The still-disputed author of the *General History of the Pyrates* complained that after the War of the Quadruple Alliance the Spanish *guardacostas* had become more active, and that the British merchants who lost profit and goods because of the actions of the *guardacostas* before and during the war had been unable to collect restitution from the Spanish government.⁷² Tensions in the West Indies and the wars that raged there until 1713 and then again in 1718 created a glut of unoccupied former soldiers and privateers, many of whom might turn to piracy in times of peace. For a privateer, after all, piracy was essentially "but the same Practice without Commission," and these men "make very little Distinction betwixt the Lawfulness of one, and the Unlawfulness of the other."⁷³ Trade built up the number of sailors in the area, and when it was convenient a subset of these men could turn pirate, benefiting from but not supporting the empire.

Accounts of ship seizures reveal the widespread understanding of these imperial conflicts by those involved, as well as their willingness to exploit ambiguities and misunderstandings to their own advantage. In part, the border nature of the area in which both empires were operating meant that out of necessity, otherwise strictly observed divisions among racial and ethnic groups could be rearranged. For instance, during his time sailing in the West Indies, Englishman Woodes Rogers reported having asked the slaves on board his ship to help defend the vessel against any French or Spanish attackers. He gave them guns and ammunition, and made sure those who did not know how to use them would be taught. Rogers placed a free Jamaican man of African ancestry who had deserted from the Spanish in charge of the group, who were now fed and clothed better because of their new position on board. Upon having recruited these new African soldiers to fight on behalf of

the ship, Rogers instructed them “they must now look upon themselves as Englishmen, and no more as Negro slaves to the Spaniards,” clearly privileging the security of his vessel and crew over the continued division of those on board between slave and free.⁷⁴ Arming former Spanish slaves allowed Rogers both to have robbed the Spanish of possible soldiers for their defense and to increase his own forces. In the case of hostility between European empires that otherwise traded enslaved African laborers between them, these slaves might be armed and used against the opposing empire in ways that would not be possible in times of peace.

Britons and Spaniards, and the various subdivisions of these national identities, were far from the only people operating with their own distinct interests in the growing American colonies. Throughout the *asiento* period, the presence of large populations of African slaves living in the colonies of each empire would complicate attempts at control of land in the area. Transporting slaves into the Spanish empire provided it not only with labor, but with potential soldiers in the event of a conflict; in a similar vein, slaves retained by the British colonies might either be called on to defend the empire or enticed away from it by enemy forces. The contested nature of control over the lands and peoples of the Americas created some room for otherwise legally disadvantaged individuals to take advantage of opportunities for greater freedom and control over their lives. As the slave population increased during the eighteenth century, and as tensions periodically rose between the British and Spanish empires, officials in both empires had to contend with the fact that free settler populations were not the only actors operating in the area.

Despite the troubles in the West Indies, the South Sea Company did make gains in the middle of the decade. In 1725, a letter from Spain indicated that relations between England and Spain in the Americas were looking up. Philip V agreed to allow small groups of company agents to travel to areas outside of their factories to more easily distribute their slaves where their labor was needed. The Buenos Aires factors were even permitted to travel as far as Chile with as many as four hundred enslaved laborers, though they were not allowed to settle permanent factories, and were to present themselves to the governor of Buenos Aires within the year as proof they were not living elsewhere, gathering information about Spanish military power or conducting their own contraband trade. The promise first established in the *asiento* contract in 1713 that the company could receive “silver, gold, or the product of the country” in exchange for their slaves and goods was reaffirmed.⁷⁵

Despite these understandings reached by the two empires regarding the trade, the peace did not persist. Some of the Spanish remained wary of the company's factors, and the British subjects living throughout the West Indies eyed Spanish privateers and officials alike warily. The difficulties each side faced with the conflicting interests of imperial actors, pirates, internal unrest, and contraband trade led to another break less than a decade after the first. This second major conflict between the empires during the course of the *asiento* contract threatened a trade from which some still expected to profit, individually or nationally.

1727 War and Reprisal

In the years leading up to the 1727 war, Anglo-Spanish tensions boiled over once again, disrupting the lives of merchants and factors who until then lived and traveled in relative peace among the Spanish in America. Distrust had arisen once again of the South Sea Company's true motivations. In 1725, a Spanish official complained that the company did not take on the *asiento* to supply slaves, but chiefly as a way of freely accessing Spanish American ports and collecting information about the interior of the country.⁷⁶ Burnet and his fellow factors once again faced trouble with their position in the Spanish empire, and many left the factories for safer shores. In 1726, the British moved to disrupt Spanish American shipping and support British smuggling with a fleet off the coast, commanded by Admiral Francis Hosier. With the Spanish seizure of the South Sea Company's *Prince Frederick* in response, combined with tensions in Europe, the empires faced off anew.⁷⁷

Spanish wariness of British intentions led to further conflict on the ground in the Americas before this war, though not all levels of the Spanish government responded to the same degree. Matthew Kent, commander of a South Sea Company ship that landed at Buenos Aires in 1726, provided an affidavit outlining the poor treatment that he and his crew faced when docking at the port. He had expected to land his merchandise and come ashore in order to rest and restock, but he was detained, and only after some arguing received permission to remain on shore for a few days. Kent attributed the difficulties he faced not to the maliciousness of the Spanish king, but to the "governors arbitrary will and pleasure," a danger he thought existed especially within the Spanish system of government. Because of the capricious cruelty of this particular governor, "the English at Buenos Ayres reced very

hard usage, and were treated more like criminals, than subjects of so great a prince as the King of Great Britain, contrary to the privileges of the *asiento* treaty.”⁷⁸ Kent’s direction of blame toward the local government may have been an attempt to limit conflict with the Spanish king. In any case, the varied policies and reactions of portions of the Spanish empire here gave the British a space in which to make complaints about their treatment without immediately positioning themselves against all aspects of the Spanish government.

As tensions came to a head, the British men who lived in the Spanish Americas faced the very real problems of belonging to what was once again an enemy nation. In October 1726 the court of directors wrote to King George to relate the harrowing story of one of their factors at Panama, Bartholomew Swartz. Swartz was appointed chief factor at Panama and Portobello in September of 1721, just after the previous reprisal against the British.⁷⁹ In May of 1726 he returned to the factory, just outside the city of Panama, after a tiring journey to Lima. According to Swartz, Panama’s sergeant major, Juan de Aretes, suddenly entered with armed men, and ordered the factor to be on his way to Portobello within four short hours. Swartz, and later the court, insisted that this was contrary to article 15 of the treaty, but he was forced to make the journey. Once in Portobello, he was made a prisoner in the house of one of the supercargoes, soon placed on one of the company’s ships, and accused of sending some damaging letters abroad upon a pirate vessel. The president of Panama resolved to send him out of the colony in a precedent that the directors condemned as counter to the treaty and, distressingly, possibly damaging to company effects and profits. Swartz remained in the West Indies until the company agreed to fund his passage home, and to give him the salary promised before he was forced from the country.⁸⁰

Swartz’s case demonstrated the dangers of company agents’ alleged actions to their position in the Spanish empire, though that the company found Swartz’s eviction to be unprecedented and objectionable is not to suggest that the factor himself held no blame in the situation in Panama. In 1728 one of his fellow factors, Thomas Blechynden, officially accused Swartz and two other men of having smuggled slaves into Portobello, in front of the court of directors, which had some jurisdiction in issues of law regarding their merchants.⁸¹ The agents had taken advantage of their position, Blechynden alleged, by marking the slaves with the company’s brand, making their subterfuge all the more difficult to detect. The factors present shared in the profits, save what they used to bribe other company employees, including

Blechynden himself, to keep them from discovering the contraband to their superiors. Blechynden insisted that he did not mean to harm the company, but was persuaded by the other factors. The testimonies of two free men of African descent, made before the court in Panama, came to the court through Blechynden as well. These men testified that in 1725 they had seen the factors marking the enslaved people at a place they called Guayabal, and heard rumors that the cargo was illegal. The accused merchants countered that they had done nothing illicit, and that the location in which the men accused them of conducting their secret transactions was almost comically highly trafficked for such activity—one claimed that “500 loaded mules pass in a day.” The court of directors ultimately decided that in fact “negroes cannot be introduced and markt clandestinely in or near Guayabal without public knowledge of it,” and with this dismissed the case, acquitted Blechynden, and asked him to pay no restitution. The court’s unwillingness to convict its factors for smuggling in this case despite the testimony of one of its agents suggests some complicity on the part of the company in contraband trade.⁸² The possibility for profit inherent in illicit trade, combined with the plentiful locations on the Spanish American coast less heavily trafficked than Guayabal, meant that factors did continue to engage in extralegal commerce with Spanish buyers.

Along with the actions of the South Sea Company employees, the desire for and proximity to the opposing empire’s lands and the continued problems with smuggling and piracy caused a rift between the nations that were briefly united in the slave trade. The British complained of the Spanish disrupting their trade, while the Spanish argued that “the English during the whole time they kept on the Coast of Portobello and Bastimentos, protected the Dutch & other ships of their own in the committing of this continual unlawful trade, defrauding the fair of Portobello of above 3 millions.”⁸³ Further, the Spanish accused, the British reloaded ships with cargo against the stipulations provided in the original treaty, and transported the goods of individuals in the annual permission ship, thus preventing the Spanish crown from collecting the relevant taxes.⁸⁴

Consequences for those moving between empires were once again swift. In January of 1727 the *British Journal* reported that the previous November, a Captain Bennett of the *Bellamont* brought slaves to Havana. Unfortunately for Bennett, he made his voyage just as Admiral Hosier was moving his squadron toward Portobello, and officials in Cuba laid an embargo on the company’s “persons and effects” until the British naval threat withdrew.⁸⁵ The

Spanish held Bennett and other British merchants in the area as punishment for British aggression, and as collateral against the taking of Spanish prisoners. This realization of one of the greatest fears of Britons trading to Spanish dominions confirmed the dangers of the tenuous friendship between the empires. Even those only stopping in Spanish territories could be seized and held among a group whose national and confessional identifications threatened the safety of their lives, their property, and their souls.

For some Britons, the 1727 conflict again raised the possibility of launching an attempt to seize Spanish lands. In a letter to Lord Townsend, then secretary of state Alexander Spotswood urged British action. Based on his extensive knowledge of the area, gleaned in his time as governor of Virginia, Spotswood noted that the many unsettled men who had gone to the Americas to make their fortune but had not yet found it would be eager to challenge the Spanish; for them, "the very name of an attempt upon the Spaniards settlements in America, will carry the face of a golden adventure." As for sailors, many harbored a "spirit of vengeance" against the Spaniards because of naval depredations, and Spotswood assured Townsend that the pirates as well were sure to assist in the British designs.⁸⁶

This relatively minor Anglo-Spanish war temporarily halted trade between the empires and resulted in the company pulling its factors from Spanish lands, in part for their safety. During both wars, the local Spanish government seized the belongings and merchandise of the factors and their factories, sometimes taking a considerable amount of time to return them upon the resumption of the peace.⁸⁷ The frequent threat of war and possibility of peace kept merchants and travelers in the West Indies guessing about the position of their empire throughout the *asiento* period. In the midst of the Anglo-Spanish conflict in 1728, Burnet wrote to Sloane from Jamaica that "As to peace or war we are still uncertain."⁸⁸ War made many in the West Indies nervous, especially as places like Jamaica were no better fortified in the late 1720s than they had been one or two decades earlier. Echoing complaints from the Jamaican Council at the beginning of the 1718 war, assembly president John Ayscough made a speech to the council and assembly early in 1726, warning that the Jamaican fortifications were in very poor condition, and alerting the king of "your country not being in a condition to make any considerable resistance against the attempt of an enemy" at a time in which "we see several powers of Europe making great Warlike Preparations."⁸⁹

Though it allowed for some additional smuggling trade, for many in Britain and its empire, the cost and trouble of the 1727 war was yet more evidence

of the negative effects of the South Sea Company on the country. Opposition writers supported the claims of private traders from Jamaica and elsewhere, agreeing that the company ruined a perfectly good business by bringing more regulation to the Anglo-Spanish trade. Further, the company was partially supporting an illicit trade through its factors that was damaging international relations and leading to repeated armed conflict with the Spanish, to the ultimate detriment of the British empire.⁹⁰ Those in the empire who initially rejected the company continued to insist that the British would be best served by pursuing Spanish profits in some other way.

The British and Spanish brought this war to an end with the Treaty of Seville, signed in that city in southern Spain in November of 1729. The main function of the treaty, besides the affirmation of peace among Britain, Spain, and France, was to reestablish the conditions in the empires first laid out in the 1667 and 1713 treaties, and to readopt the *asiento* contract as outlined in the 1713 and 1716 treaties.⁹¹ While the nations agreed to cease outright hostilities against the other empires involved and to reassume the trade in goods and slaves to the Spanish American ports, they did little to keep the problems faced in 1727 from restarting and again damaging the peace and its profits. Further problems arose from a refusal to honor the treaty in a timely manner.⁹²

Sir Robert Walpole, who had a key role in the negotiations, suggested that the Treaty of Seville was an excellent sign that the Spanish king had resolved to maintain a good relationship with Great Britain. As with other treaties signed between the powers, it specified the return of all the goods and ships that were seized by each power during the hostilities between the empires; the British were particularly eager for the return of the permission ship the *Prince Frederick* and its cargo.⁹³ Walpole's comments on the treaty reveal his exasperation with the Britons who continued to engage in extensive contraband trade in the area while expecting the protection of the British government. No ship, he promised the public, would be seized for a small infraction such as having a single Spanish coin on board, as the treaty provided for such eventualities. Any British subject taken by the Spanish would be protected by the king if he or she was acting justly; any transgressions of "the articles of Commerce long establish'd between the two Nations" could not be similarly protected.⁹⁴ Walpole knew that the disruption of the trade by Spanish officials and pirates could not be blamed for the entirety of the conflict in the West Indies. Given the breadth of visions for an empire that would be profitable, and the reluctance to conform to imperial policy at the expense of personal

benefits, Britons could be just as unruly and dangerous to the empire's economic interests as Spanish *guardacostas*.

The creation of this peace and its terms deeply concerned the South Sea Company, and they intended to have a hand in it. In 1728 the company moved Burnet from his post in the West Indies in order to assist the British delegation at the Congress of Soissons, where the empires were negotiating the end of the Anglo-Spanish war.⁹⁵ Throughout the previous decades, Burnet had been collecting specimens, conducting trade, and making connections with Spanish associates. As it turned out, the South Sea Company was perhaps too accommodating of Burnet's affinity for the Spanish. It was during his stay at Soissons that Burnet made a secret agreement with the Spanish government to provide them with information about the illicit trade being carried out by the South Sea Company and its employees throughout the Spanish empire, especially information that might present a full and accurate set of complaints against the British for their extensive contraband trade. He recommended that the *asiento* be revoked from the British and given to a Spanish-controlled company, negating the benefit to the British from both legal and contraband trade. In return for all his information, in March 1729 he received a pension from the Spanish government, and was later recommended by the Spanish secretary of state to be appointed as *médico de cámara*, or physician to the king.⁹⁶

Burnet provided ample details about the ways in which the British evaded and bribed Spanish officials in order to bring their own goods for sale into Spanish American ports, and even as far as the large mining settlements inland. Along with another informant, Matthew Plowes, Burnet admitted that the company was well aware of the contraband trade it drove, and that it was involved deeply. The South Sea Company's failure to keep its factors from conducting their own private trade led to a considerable glut of unauthorized merchandise flowing into the Spanish empire and severely damaged the trading opportunities for Spain's own galleons. He noted that there had been trading ships sent from Jamaica with armed escorts, and that many of the company's ships would not sail but for the captain's assuring the crew that they could conduct trade on their own accounts while on the Spanish American coasts. Plowes revealed further that the Chevalier d'Eon, the Spanish representative in the South Sea Company, had been bribed to help conceal the contraband smuggling through the annual permission ship and the slaving ships.⁹⁷ The men also admitted that the company had a hand in carrying Spanish passengers, and their money, out of the Americas, contrary to

Spanish law meant to keep wealth within the empire. Burnet reportedly even instructed his wife travel to the West Indies to send back documents confirming his claims.⁹⁸ The blame for these breaks from the expectations set out in the *asiento* contract, according to Plowes, lay with the company rather than the country. The company, in contact with local governors through its agents, broke international agreements repeatedly.⁹⁹ Spain here had proof of many of the nefarious practices on the part of the British that they had long suspected, and as a result Spain's ministers were less willing to negotiate with Britain for the restoration of the *asiento* trade, though an agreement was eventually reached.¹⁰⁰

Burnet's decision to leave his empire, to cut himself off from his home country, and to bring his family to live among the Spanish realized some of the deepest fears that Britons had held for centuries about the implications of sending merchants to live in areas controlled by Spain. If the London clergy had been concerned that the Spanish merchants might have attended the occasional mass in the course of their business, Burnet's defection indicated that things could be much, much worse on the edges of empire, where specie and people circulated across imperial boundaries and the stakes rose because information, and with it, land and power, could easily change hands. Here it became clear that Britons' identification with their country of origin could not be relied upon to keep merchants from not only failing to support British interests, but even damaging them. The men who traveled to the edges of their empires faced repeated challenges to their loyalties, and did not always consider the interests of their nation or empire above their own profits or social concerns. Indeed, those British merchants who had in the course of their travels collected so much information about both empires could be boons to peaceful cooperation in trade, or they could help one empire at the expense of the other. The project of building British overseas imperial power with individual Britons meant constant conflict between the interests of Britain and the interests of its subjects and agents on the periphery.

In providing this damning information to the Spanish government during the peace negotiations, Burnet rejected his former loyalty to both the South Sea Company and the wider British economic good. Yet through the next decade Burnet continued his correspondence with Sloane and other Britons. He sent medical and natural observations as well as official diplomatic information from Madrid. His grand hopes continued, and he meant to use his British connections to establish an academy in Spain equivalent to the Royal Society of London. It appears that Burnet lived the rest of his life in

Spain, where his position as a man who understood and could negotiate between both empires provided him a comfortable living.¹⁰¹ Any fears that the *asiento* treaty and the close interaction of peoples that it required might lead to cultural contamination or blurring of loyalties in the West Indies found confirmation in the defection of a former British South Sea Company employee to the service of the Spanish empire.

The wars of the 1710s and 1720s deeply disrupted the peace and trade, but South Sea Company employees continued to live and work in Spanish America among Spanish subjects. Their presence had a deep impact on these individuals and on the empires through which they moved and the knowledge they collected could improve scientific understanding, support legal and illegal trade, and even upset the balance of international politics. At times of imperial disruption the fates of these men could be imperiled and, as imperial concern focused on the Caribbean, the dangers they faced and the depredations they themselves participated in became matters of interimperial and diplomatic concern. The 1730s would witness further breakdown in Anglo-Spanish relations in the West Indies, but the company's factors, working on the company's behalf and on their own, would continue to live and form relationships in the Spanish Americas.

CHAPTER 3

“Unjust Depredations” and Growing Tensions, 1729–1738

The asiento trade had been interrupted repeatedly by war in its first decade and a half of implementation, but despite these conflicts the governments of Britain and Spain reinstated the treaty and resumed trade after each break. In the 1730s, relations between the nations in the Americas faltered once again, as contraband, ship seizures, and internal disruptions within the colonies made conditions in the West Indies difficult for all. The groups involved in the area—independent traders, company agents, settlers, government officials, and those in London and Madrid with investments in the Americas—each had distinct and conflicting interests that heightened tensions in the area and repeatedly interrupted the trade and peace. Participating in the development of the empires on the ground meant an opportunity for great profit for the agents of the South Sea Company, but also brought with it the possibility of ruin, detention, or disaster for individuals, companies, and empires.¹ The company encouraged its agents on the ground to situate themselves firmly in Spanish America to facilitate the trade, but as interaction increased, so too did the potential danger. Through the 1730s, trouble with religious courts, pirates, *guardacostas*, and Maroon communities, made up of escaped slaves living in the mountainous interior of Jamaica, continued to make the Anglo-Spanish trade a challenge.

South Sea Company agents, such as Jonathan Dennis, living in the West Indies saw the destructive spiral that shook the asiento agreement in the 1730s firsthand, and many experienced the negative consequences for themselves. Dennis, agent to several factories in the Spanish Americas during his long employment with the company, had direct familiarity with the troubles accompanying the decline of the asiento period throughout his tenure in the

area. Though in many ways he provides an example of the kind of life that a South Sea Company factor could expect to have during the 1730s, he was not strictly an average case: he endured long years of conflict with the Inquisition courts of Spanish America, a trouble feared, but not experienced, by many of those in the company's service. Dennis's exchanges with the Spanish, his encounters with contraband trade and piracy, and his presence in the Caribbean during the First Maroon War illuminate the myriad causes of the 1739 war and demonstrate the impact of the decline of Anglo-Spanish cooperation on the individuals who were at its forefront.

From letters and South Sea Company records, the broad outlines of Dennis's life can be reconstructed, and a few key events understood in detail. By the time he got to Cuba in 1731, Dennis had already been an employee of the company for nine years. He spent many of those years as chief factor at the Portobello and Panama factories. Upon his transfer to the factory at Santiago de Cuba, Dennis complained to the local Spanish officials of having apprehended an enslaved woman from the Congo who did not bear the South Sea Company's brand. Investigation into the matter revealed that the woman had been brought to the area by a French ship, and that contrary to the rules of the *asiento*, the sale was reported to the company's factory. This was of particular interest to the company, both because of the monopoly it was supposed to have over the market and because of the taxes the company was supposed to pay on imported slaves.² Dennis continued to face problems with contraband trade throughout his time as the Havana factor, a common difficulty for South Sea Company employees and Spanish officials alike.³ Despite his concerns for his employers' rights, and also like many company factors, he engaged in this trade on his own account as well.

Connection and Conflict

Through the end of the *asiento* period the contraband traffic that plagued the early years of the trade continued in full force and sparked complaints from individuals from both empires. Just between 1730 and 1734, twelve South Sea Company ships, and many more private vessels, were seized for contraband activity.⁴ The problem of smuggling arose from a combination of actions by the company, its agents operating independently, and other traders. In 1723–1724, for example, the company ship the *Royal Prince* transported considerably more than the allowed five hundred tons of British merchandise into the

interiors of Spanish America before eventually receiving word from the crown that they were to be restricted to selling in the ports.⁵ The extensive trade represented considerable unofficial cooperation among members of numerous empires, including at various times private traders from Jamaica and other British islands, Spanish merchants and officials, and company employees trading on their own accounts. For these groups, the project of empire could often be less about national power and more about the benefits to individuals, who sought profit, adventure, and fluidity of movement. This trade simultaneously enriched and strengthened bonds between individuals and damaged the relationship between the empires by preventing mercantile control and limiting the collection of tariffs. Tensions grew internationally as pressures rose for different officials to protect the profitability of their own empire's shipping.⁶

The extensive contraband trade that developed during the *asiento* period vexed officials in both the British and Spanish empires while actually creating opportunities for increased interaction between the British and Spanish individuals who worked together to move illicit goods through the ports of Spanish America. Through the 1730s the company's directors worked to reduce the contraband trade coming from Britain and its colonies, which both strained international relations and created competition on top of what they already faced from French and Dutch merchants.⁷ The company worried for much of the 1730s that the cycle of contraband trade and reprisals by the Spanish would move the countries toward war, which would jeopardize the company's assets in the Americas.⁸ During this last decade of officially cooperative relations between the empires, positive individual relationships faltered as the empires geared up for war once again. While growing out of increased interaction and cooperation between members of these empires, this trade and the privateers and pirates who surrounded it actually decreased the possibilities for future peaceful contact between Britons and Spaniards in the Americas.

The company and the Spanish government in Madrid sought to restrict contraband trade, which damaged the official trade and made collecting taxes on slaves and goods more difficult. After the 1729 peace, trade between the nations resumed, but by 1733 even the court of directors was willing to admit that it likely would never be able to import the 4,800 slaves per year required in the *asiento* contract because of the glutted markets in their permitted ports, which had been supplied illegally by smugglers. They pushed for a wider legal trade. Without permission to send additional ships to

Campeche, Trujillo, Maracaibo, and other parts of the coast where supplies were low, they argued in a letter to the British secretary of state, the duke of Newcastle, they could hardly be expected to reach their quota.⁹ Despite the company's failures, when private traders outfitted slave ships for voyages to the Spanish American coasts, the court of directors would respond by asking the Spanish governors to intercept the interlopers, and either soldiers or *guardacostas* would be sent to keep them from the trade.¹⁰

In part, this outward restriction of contraband trade on the part of the court of directors served as a way for the company to display to the Spanish government their intolerance for breaches in the terms established by the treaties of 1713 and 1716. Actions against contraband trade might also benefit the court and its stockholders, as it allowed the company's ships and merchandise to officially dominate the majority of the market in goods to Spanish America with their own legal or illegal trade. The company's trade in slaves to the Spanish Main faced direct competition from illegal private commerce coming out of the British colonies. The Jamaican factor John Merewether complained that those slaves who were not purchased for sale in the factories because they did not meet the company's standards would be taken away by private traders and sold in other areas of the Spanish Americas, particularly the South Keys and Hispaniola, reducing potential sales for the company by crowding the market and furthering the problems of oversupply of which the court of directors complained.¹¹

The independent merchants who interfered with the company's trade, many from Jamaica, continued to dislike the restrictions of the treaty, knowing that they could make their own profits on the Spanish American coasts. The company's position meant a severe reduction in the kinds of trade they had been able to engage in during the pre-1713 period. Some Jamaicans complained that by insisting upon a commercial monopoly the company was being both greedy and unreasonable. Its restriction of the trade had widespread ill effects on the economic health of the British Empire, one pamphleteer argued: "How many Thousands in Great-Britain have suffer'd thereby, and been deprived of an industrious and gainful Subsistance! What a many of the Inhabitants of Jamaica have been drove from thence, for want of Employ; besides the Number of Sailors who had their Dependance thereon, and are forced to seek their Bread amongst Foreigners in other Parts of the World!"¹² While the court of directors opposed the nonmonopoly trade, some Britons apparently felt it was not active enough. Despite the company's indirect role in making illicit trade more common for Britons in the West

Indies by opening the region to some British shipping, others, particularly those in Jamaica, continued to argue that the company was bad for the country.

While the South Sea Company factors were required by their employers to monitor and report extralegal activity, many privileged their pocketbooks and engaged in individual contraband trade during their time in the Spanish empire, with apparent disregard for the official policies of the company or the British Empire. This was mainly a problem for the nation and the company because despite the increased overall market for British goods, this trade drew protest from Madrid and limited the company's share of Spanish American profits. Both local officials and company employees profited from the bribery that pervaded Spanish American ports.¹³ Local Spanish subjects profited also from the access to a thriving contraband market that was crucial to keeping the area supplied; in places like Buenos Aires, this market brought the city into contact with the wider world in a way that would not have otherwise been possible.¹⁴

One of the most common ways to bring contraband goods into the Spanish colonies was on board the annual permission ship. The goods could be added after the ship was officially weighed and left the British port of origin. For example, a sailor who was aboard the *Prince William*, the permission ship that sailed to Portobello in 1730/1731, reported that the captain, on his way from the Thames where the ship's weight was certified to the Spanish territories of the New World, anchored at St. Christopher's to take on contraband. Sailors removed the ship's guns and stores in order to provide room for private trade, which was forbidden by the *asiento* treaty.¹⁵ The loading of wax, cinnamon, and other goods left the ship considerably heavier than the six hundred and fifty tons allowed by the 1716 treaty. To avoid detection by officials of either empire, those in charge of the ship "distributed amongst the aforesaid *Prince William*'s Ship's Company, two hundred Pounds, or thereabouts . . . being for Hush-Money, in order that they should not inform, confess, or take Notice of anything relating to the aforesaid Private Cargo."¹⁶ Given the inclusion of this story in the pamphlet, it appears that this was insufficient motivation to keep quiet. Factors might also route their contraband through the ships that regularly landed in their ports with cargoes of slaves. While factors were technically allowed to carry supplies and medicine for themselves and in order to feed and clothe slaves before their sale, they were forbidden to sell these goods to the Spanish.¹⁷ Factors could easily import

goods for sale under cover of the merchandise being for their own use, and sell it secretly for their individual profit.

The South Sea Company explicitly noted the dangers they saw in the persistence of contraband trade by outsiders and their own employees, though they did not always discourage this trade. Illicit goods could drive down the company's profits, but more troubling, the situation in the West Indies increased Spanish counter-contraband efforts, which interfered with the company's mostly legal trade. If the Spanish discovered any contraband goods on board a South Sea Company ship, complaints indicated, the whole of the cargo might be seized. Further, the mixing of legal and illegal trade left the entire business open to fraud and embezzlement on the part of the factors processing these imported goods, which also limited company profits. In 1732, an anonymous "Proprietor of the said Company" encouraged the court of directors in print to interrogate both their supercargoes and factors, "sparing no Pains to get at the truth of this black Scene of Villany." Those who bemoaned the condition of the company abroad were concerned with both profit and the international reputation of the British. A public display needed to be made, the pamphleteer argued, in order for the company to make Britain's position in the matter clear: "Let us also shew the King of Spain and his Ministers, that we will detect all fraudulent Traders, and will only carry on a fair Trade."¹⁸

The South Sea Company also encountered problems with a kind of contraband trade that they had little opportunity of ever controlling—that of European and non-European individuals outside of their own empire. In 1732 Benjamin Keene, Ambassador to Spain, observed that a significant amount of contraband trade was moving into the Spanish empire from the Portuguese colonies in South America. This trade included enslaved laborers, and the collusion of Portuguese traders and Spanish officials left the British company "vastly prejudiced by them, great numbers [of slaves] being annually clandestinely convey'd to the neighbouring provinces."¹⁹ Along with the Portuguese, the French and Dutch, who had long conducted a trade to the area at various levels of legality, crowded the Spanish markets with goods and slaves from time to time, jeopardizing company profits.

Though the treaty officially protected Britain's monopoly, the actions of Spanish American governors repeatedly contradicted the policies of Madrid, as New World officials sought to line their own pockets and best manage their own territories. The court of directors complained on numerous

occasions of the active participation of Spanish governors in the circumvention of the *asiento* treaty's guarantees of monopoly over the trade in slaves to the company. The hostility against the British trade seemed arbitrary: "these Governors open and shut the doors against us where & as often as they think fit, & are in truth the Companys Enemies, & thereby friends to clandestine & illicit introduction of Negroes for their own ends."²⁰ Though at times the Spanish governors would welcome British shipping, they would spurn the British in favor of their other European rivals when it benefited them, despite the official policy in Madrid.²¹ To ensure that the company received its fair share of trade, and that the Spanish government received its due portion of these sales, company factors branded enslaved laborers with the company's sign, and as in Dennis's 1731 case, sometimes brought the sale of slaves without this brand to official attention.²² The continual difficulty of regulating trade, along with "such perpetual obstructions & embarrassments, such unwarrantable extortion, violent seizures & unjustifiable imprisonments," led the directors to conclude that "no trade can possibly be carried on to advantage."²³ If conditions in the West Indies and on the Spanish Main did not change, there would be little reason to continue the trade and officially positive relations between the empires.

Under the Bourbon reforming impulse, the Spanish imperial government also complained bitterly of the contraband trade carried out by the British through and outside of the South Sea Company. A set of grievances issued by the king of Spain in 1739 singled out "the illicit unwarrantable trade which the English have for a long time and do still carry on" as a reason for Spain's refusal to meet some of its financial obligations as established in the *asiento* treaty.²⁴ Spain characterized this as "a trade that is already grown to too unreasonable an extent, it yielding yearly several millions, as they themselves confess; a trade that is contrary to all laws of justice and equity, prejudicial to the trade allow'd and enjoy'd by other nations, and greatly hurtful and injurious to His Catholick Majesty's revenues and government."²⁵ If the British could not be bothered to control their own subjects and prevent contraband trade to the Spanish territories, the Spanish crown saw no reason to fulfill its contractual obligations. From the perspective of some merchants and officials on the Spanish American coasts, these crackdowns were deeply damaging to the interests of Spanish American subjects. In the first decade of the *asiento* trade, the merchants of Panama complained of the restrictions being undertaken to control the contraband trade, and in response, the seizures of illicit goods stopped for some time.²⁶ Despite the acceptance and even

encouragement of illegal trade from merchants and subjects on the ground on the Spanish Main, however, the crown continued their overall policy of sending *guardacostas* against the British ships, and cracked down on trade moving into the South Sea factories. They were particularly interested in ships that carried specie, the exportation of which was forbidden, and logwood, a dyewood illegally cut on the Spanish Main by British loggers and carried back to London on British ships. Britons complained that the Spanish would seize ships merely for having some logwood on board, a trespass they deemed too slight to merit the confiscation of their cargo.²⁷

As the 1730s progressed, repeated complaints about the *guardacostas* and their "unjust Depredations" circulated from British sailors and merchants. For their part, the Spanish insisted that they were the victims of "real piracies, persecutions and Cruelties" perpetrated by British subjects.²⁸ As contraband trade flourished in the West Indies, the legal cover available for privateers created an environment in which piracy in its various forms became quite an attractive option for sailors. For the empires involved, the two problems were closely related, as pirates could claim to be patrolling the seas searching ships for illegal trade, and Spanish *guardacostas* could be denounced as pirates.²⁹ Although many historians have characterized the late 1720s as the decline of the Golden Age of Piracy, the continued interimperial conflict regarding the seizure of ships indicates that pirates and their legal counterparts were still very much a part of the Caribbean experience through the end of the 1730s.³⁰ Tacit encouragement of piracy was a convenient way to damage enemies, and a source of further emotional and economic ire against the opposing empire, as stories about the depredations of pirates circulated and became a matter of official complaint.³¹

As far as those trading in the West Indies were concerned, the prevalence of piracy resulted either from neglect or outright hostility on the part of the opposing empire. According to the reports of the British, the Spanish governors would welcome ships that had taken British prizes into their harbors, regardless of the legality of the seizure. The crew of the *Exeter* claimed that when the Spanish brought their vessel into Cuba, "one of the chief magistrates of the said port of Baracao, did own and confess publicly in the hearing of these opponents, that he had committed many acts of piracy he being accustomed to that way of living."³² News of this kind indicated to Britons that the Spanish government was making insufficient efforts to keep their international shipping fair and safe. If Britons in the metropole could hope for diplomatic solutions, Britons living in the West Indies could no longer patiently wait for restitution of prizes captured by the Spanish.

British sailors and the public had concerns far beyond the maintenance of profitable commerce. Tales of the violence and disregard for human dignity perpetrated by the Spanish continued to circulate in the English-speaking world as frictions between the two crowns grew. In 1737 Captain Tomas Weir's ship was taken near Santa Martha, and news traveled back to Great Britain of the "most inhuman murther committed by the Spaniards" thereon.³³ Witnesses reported that a Spanish man got onto the British ship under an assumed name. After eating dinner together, the Spanish man, Don Pedro Machado, "in cold blood took a pistol belonging to the SuperCargo, shot him with it, & stabbed him several times till he dyed." He then killed the captain and his slave, as well as the rest of the crew.³⁴ This account of Spanish depredations against the British recalled a long tradition in Britain of portraying the Spanish as particularly violent and vicious, a view extending back to the Black Legend and anti-Spanish sentiment in the sixteenth century.

The Spanish continued to counter the contraband trade by authorizing *guardacostas* to patrol the coasts, and Spanish pirates continued to claim that they were acting under these authorizations. The legal and illegal trades that crowded the Caribbean with slaves, goods, and specie made this a particularly rich site for piracy, and the ambiguity in the legality of some of the trade made these thefts easier still. For their part, Britons continued to complain that the Spanish ships were seizing cargo illegally, with little regard for the status or destination of the merchandise. The choice of which ships to detain seemed to the British to be based entirely on military force and financial gain: *guardacostas* could not capture ships larger than them, "but all they can overcome are adjudged good prize."³⁵ The Spanish government received reports of illegal seizures by their subjects from the British, but as far as the British could tell, did little to respond to these complaints. Hoping that the British government would back up their ships in any eventual break with Spain, settlers and merchants documented conflicts with the Spanish in great detail, sending narratives of their humiliations and inventories of the goods lost to London. The South Sea Company put particular pressure on the government to ensure the return of the company's ships seized by *guardacostas* or as part of the *represalias* during the minor wars. They also expressed concerns about the English seizure of Spanish vessels, and the general state of tension and mutual wariness that these seizures created. They asked for a *cedula* from the king putting a stop to these mutual seizures, "or otherwise the Royal Company's vessells and effects will always be liable to embargoes and embarrassments, and even the annual ship and her cargo may not be

exempted."³⁶ The company had a very real interest in ending the disruption of their trade caused by seizure of their ships, experiencing a tension between a call for government protection and an impulse to avoid war so the trade could continue. The independent traders and Spanish officials who needed to supply their colonies with goods and slaves outside of the legal system wished to keep all these lines of trade open, while pirates and privateers profited from redirecting that illegal trade through their own networks. This clash of interests in the West Indies made the situation unsustainable.

British merchants and colonial officials sometimes complained directly to the local Spanish governments in hopes that governors would value maintaining peace and trade over protecting their wayward subjects. In 1732 the Jamaican governor, Robert Hunter, wrote to the governor of Santiago de Cuba, taking a very diplomatic tone in describing an alleged attack on a British ship. Hunter assured the governor that he did not directly suspect the Spanish or local Cuban government of having any hand in the seizure of the ship: "I did not in the least doubt but it was the act of some pyrate living in defiance of all laws & out of protection of all Christian princes, & could not entertain the least suspicion that the subjects of his Catholick majesty were any way concerned," given the prohibitions against illegal seizures that were issued by both crowns.³⁷ Hunter combined this placating language with a stern suggestion that the governor command the return of all British goods under his authority, and gave notice that news of the complaint would be sent to the British king as well. Here, recognition of the divisions among the various groups benefiting in sometimes conflicting ways from the existence of the American empires allowed Hunter an opportunity to seek mutual understanding with the Cuban governor, encouraging him to uphold a royal order even while some factions among the Spanish encouraged attacks on British shipping. Despite these pleas, if Madrid had the ability to restrict its subjects in the Americas, it did little to exercise that control.

British merchants and sailors sent home detailed complaints that highlighted the poor treatment they allegedly received from the Spanish, contrary to the stipulations created by treaties existing between the groups. They often included reports not only of illegal seizure, but also violence and humiliations perpetrated against British sailors. In 1729 Lane Whitehall, commander of the *Loyall George*, reported that he had news of a British sloop taken near Santo Domingo. In interrogating the crew about other British vessels nearby, the Spanish intimidated the prisoners by burning matches between their fingers. They then put the crew in a small canoe, but it soon overturned,

drowning all but the captain. Whitehall had heard also of another ship, taken by a pirate, on which the women on board were stripped naked and whipped, two of them to death.³⁸ Ships were certainly being seized by the Spanish. While the description of extreme violence in this particular event comes only from the British sailors at second hand, and could be subject to exaggeration, it does demonstrate the growing tensions between the empires.

South Sea Company employees, living in the midst of the Spanish Americas, were well-situated to observe this deterioration in cooperation. At the very time that Jonathan Dennis was addressing the problem of slaves being illegally imported into Cuba by traders other than those employed by the South Sea Company, he was writing to his employers about the troubles he saw with pirates in the West Indies. The British subjects living in the West Indies made a particular project of collecting information about the Spanish *guardacostas*, though they made little distinction between those legally dispatched by the Spanish government and those “pyrates” that sailed the coasts for their own benefit. In 1731 Dennis and Leonard Cocke, who were stationed at the Santiago de Cuba factory, reported to Benjamin Keene, the company’s representative in Madrid, that there were a dozen or more Spanish ships in operation around the island, each carrying about one hundred sailors. The factors included for Keene a list of “those vermin called *guarda costas*,” including some details of their lives. They appeared to be well acquainted, at least through reputation, with “Diego de Morales (a little man as to size) born in Port St. Mary’s in Spain & married to a Negro woman in Portorico, sails in a sloop called the *Esperanza* with 8 guns and 12 swivels, upwards of 100 men.”³⁹ The other captains on their list had been born throughout the Spanish empire, including in the Canary Islands, Puerto Rico, Havana, and Santiago de Cuba. While authorized by the Spanish government, these privateers did not always have the interests of Madrid in mind, making them more likely to depart from the legal business of patrolling for contraband for the more lucrative but politically dangerous business of stealing from and even injuring Britons.

Separate from their long list, the Cuba factors made a particular point of the danger posed to British shipping by a Spanish pirate named Don Juan de León Fandiño, “a notorious villain, who lies cruising between Cape Antonio & the mouth of the harbour of Havana.” Fandiño particularly vexed British merchants moving through the Caribbean, and in British eyes he was clearly and damningly affiliated with the Spanish. With his ship of eight guns and his crew of eighty, he would seize vessels and confiscate all their valuable cargo

before releasing them.⁴⁰ Rear Admiral Charles Stewart wrote from Jamaica asking the British government to increase its attempts to end Fandiño's operations in that sea. While Stewart allowed that "you cannot capitally punish a man without a judicial hearing," he speculated that failing to end the depredations of a pirate made the government complicit in the continuation of his crimes. He reported that the British king ordered him to "demand restitution of the damages done, or the delivery up of the persons that have committed the facts," and that failure to comply with this would lead to him taking further, though still legal, measures against the Spanish.⁴¹ The empires' failures to control their own subjects, "pirate" or otherwise, would lead to increasingly tense relations between the Spanish and British throughout the 1730s.

A 1731 encounter between Fandiño and a London mariner, Robert Jenkins, near Havana, would touch off the major Anglo-Spanish war of the *asiento* period. On Jenkins's return to London he explained that Fandiño and his men boarded his ship, the *Rebecca*, claiming to be officers of the king of Spain. He invited them to search his cargo for any contraband, as he insisted he had none on board. At that point fifty men came aboard, searched all the hatches, and found nothing. They beat Jenkins's servant brutally, hoping the man would admit to the location of a prize. After some time and no confession, Jenkins recounted, the Spanish tortured the servant boy to death. They repeatedly hanged Jenkins, nearly killing him, and finally cut his ear off and nearly scalped him. He reported that "they returned the piece of his ear again, and bid him give it to King George, uttering some scandalous words."⁴² It was this ear that Jenkins later ostensibly brought to Parliament, sparking outrage that led to the conflict bearing his name, the War of Jenkins's Ear.⁴³ In the same year, the privateer Miguel Henriquez carried off Englishmen from the South Sea Company's factory in Puerto Rico.⁴⁴ Whether or not these British informants were exaggerating Spanish brutality, their insistence on the details of these depredations demonstrates the kinds of violence that Britons believed the Spanish to be capable of, and the kinds of information that circulated in the English-speaking world about the Spanish. These actions were deemed particularly cruel in the context of a treaty securing peaceful trade between members of these empires. The British were further bothered by Spain's refusal to punish the privateers. Fandiño continued to hold a *guardacosta* commission long after this incident, and Englishmen reported encounters with him as late as the 1740s.⁴⁵

The essential theme throughout complaints by the South Sea Company and others about interactions with *guardacostas* centered around the British

not being treated as equal trading partners, but as criminals. The objectionable treatment of Britons by *guardacostas* was reported to continue long after the initial seizure of the ship, endangering South Sea Company employees and independent traders alike. In 1737 an anonymous letter writer told of the capture of his ship as it sailed through the Gulf of Florida. Before bringing the ship to Havana, the writer asserted, the Spanish sailors came aboard “armed with guns & cutlasses, plundering and robbing us whatever they could lay their hands on, stripping us naked, not leaving us the second shirt to our back.” Here the crew faced an exercise of force, and indeed of humiliation, far beyond what might reasonably be required in a simple seizure of contraband goods. A further insult, the British were allowed only “jurked beef & magotty bread” while they were held as prisoners aboard the Spanish man-of-war in the Havana harbor. The Spanish bound them in irons, and generally treated them in a manner that the captured Britons characterized as unchristian.⁴⁶ In another case, a British man accused of carrying illegal goods encountered pirates, whose captain “forc’d me upon the Poope among ye slaves in chains & then went to prayers” before he was eventually questioned.⁴⁷ He objected to being treated as if he were of lower status than the Spanish “Don.” Some Britons found the Spanish in the Americas to display insufficient respect, as well as a fundamental disregard for the status of the company and its ships guaranteed by the *asiento* treaty. Madrid could make promises to Britain, but *guardacostas* and local officials acted with their own concerns in mind, just as with British subjects and company agents who pursued profit with little concern for imperial policies.

The extensive contraband trade and prevalent piracy of the 1730s led to the deterioration of cooperation between these empires and their subjects at multiple levels. The conflict between the interests of individual factors, independent traders, and privateers, and the policies of the empires, had destroyed the possibility of extended positive official relations between Britain and Spain in the West Indies. While some in Britain had supported the Spanish American trade in hopes of increasing the empire’s wealth, in this later period negative depictions of the Spanish reemerged forcefully, and stood as examples of why Spain should not be trusted. The West Indies continued to be a place where individuals at all levels of empire acted on their own interests, given the shifting opportunities presented by interimperial cooperation and conflict.

Living Between Empires

The monopoly that the South Sea Company held on the official trade was slowed and sometimes stopped due to the international conflicts caused by widespread piracy and contraband trade in the area. These tensions, caused by detaining ships, glutting markets, and contributing to wars, were not the only threats faced in the execution of the treaty in the 1730s. As British and Spanish subjects took advantage of the situation in the West Indies to line their own pockets through trade or theft, on land the whims of individual Spanish colonial governors at times made the position of the British agents precarious. The company did what it could to protect its factors in the Americas, but distance and diplomatic issues made this difficult. The *asiento* trade suffered also because of religious fears on both sides, as the Spanish Catholics objected to the actions of the potentially unruly Protestants in their midst.

The Spanish Catholic religious establishment retained their earlier concerns about the challenge the South Sea Company's agents might pose to the established religion of the empire. The terms of the *asiento* bound the factors not to "give offense" to Catholicism, and the officials monitoring Spanish ports kept close watch in order to ensure that this rule was followed. The agents of the Inquisition at Cartagena detained packages sent to the factors living at the port, and examined the many volumes of books in English that were sent from London to factors such as John Burnet.⁴⁸ More troubling than the written word, the Spanish looked to the souls of their African laborers with a new insistence in 1725 that the slaves imported come directly from the coast of Africa, rather than transported through or born in the British colonies. The court of directors of the South Sea Company claimed that the Spanish clergy preferred slaves from the African coast because of their belief "that the negroes by being brought into British Colonys, are tainted with heresy, which renders it more difficult for the priests to convert them to the Roman Catholick religion."⁴⁹ The directors complained that the enforcement of such restrictions would be very damaging, because the factory at Jamaica always kept groups of slaves on the island to fill cargoes sent to the Spanish Americas, which would have to be counted a loss to the company if they were banned from those shores.⁵⁰

Some British individuals moving through Spanish lands felt similar trepidation about the implications of living among the Spanish. Though the records of the South Sea Company do not contain any accounts of trouble

created over the importation of British books, the presence of the Inquisition could create real problems for Britons living within Spanish dominions. Francis Stratford, who was sent to Madrid as an agent for the company at the court there, wrote to the court of directors to express his concern over the possible fate of his goods and heirs if he should die while abroad. He worried that “being a protestant, [he would] be liable to have all his goods & papers seized and confiscated, as well as those which belong to the Company, as what belong to his private affairs & have his family turned into the street, on pretence that there is no legal heir of their religion present.”⁵¹

Several sailors who came to the Americas on South Sea Company ships appeared before the Inquisition in Mexico in the 1720s and 1730s. Certain men came before the tribunal somewhat willingly, as a way to regularize their presence in the Spanish empire with at least one of the local institutions or to gain freedom after having been detained. Nicholas Carpenter, for instance, reported in 1721 that he arrived on the Spanish American coast as a sailor with the South Sea Company permission ship the *Royal Prince* several years earlier, and stayed in the area despite the war that soon erupted between the empires. After a year in prison he begged the Inquisition to allow him to reconcile himself to the Catholic Church.⁵² Other Britons were accused of more serious crimes than being present in the Spanish Americas as unauthorized non-Catholics. William Lea, a Protestant born in Bermuda, was bringing slaves to Guatemala for the company in 1733 when he was detained by the Inquisition’s court in Mexico City and accused of speaking about religion, contrary to the *asiento* contract, and possibly damaging the Catholic Church. Further, he had slandered the Irish as thieves, specifically because of their Catholicism, and shown several people in the viceroyalty a heretical book.⁵³ As some expected when the empires signed the treaty, Protestant Britons living in the Spanish empire could never really be safe while the Inquisition operated around them, and as the Spanish suspected, allowing Britons into their lands could lead to disruption. While individual Catholic Spanish subjects may have had little reserve in interacting with and befriending Britons, the church continued to be suspicious of their presence.

The depictions of the Spanish circulating within Great Britain during the later *asiento* trade suggested a people who could not be trusted, who would damage the British economically and militarily as well as religiously. A 1730 pamphlet published in London provides a particularly vivid example of the imagined connection between the South Sea Company, Anglo-Spanish contacts, and negative outcomes. In *The South-Sea Kidnapper*, a man identified

only as J. B. complained that a Spanish gentleman named Joseph Belliagos who lodged at the author's home in London had enticed away both his journeyman and apprentice, promising them better conditions in Spain. This was particularly irksome because the author had, with translation assistance from a South Sea Company clerk, helped Belliagos by allowing him to lodge in his home in order to escape from a situation in which he was being "ill used." When the man next debauched the maid, the author evicted her from the house, but Belliagos brought her back against her master's wishes, hiding her in his room and bringing her food. Later, this maid aided Belliagos to "enquire after poor artificers, and to encourage them to go abroad," to the detriment of themselves and Great Britain.⁵⁴

According to J. B., Belliagos committed several other insults to himself and the well-being of Great Britain during his time in the country. He acquired various tools that he meant to take abroad with him along with the "poor artificers." Furthermore, he threatened J. B.'s life, though he continued to store his belongings at his home. When Belliagos left, J. B. reported, he stopped at the South Sea House, the company's headquarters, to pick up the clerk who assisted J. B. in his earlier translations, suggesting some collusion between those who traded to Spanish America and those who would disrupt lives in Britain. Indeed, the presence of the Spanish seemed to encourage all sorts of transgression and debauchery: Belliagos kept an English mistress, "to whom I was told he was married, and had made her a Roman-Catholick." One witness reported he took her away with him to Spain, and that he "saw her dress'd in Man's cloathes before she went on Board, and said she look'd very handsome."⁵⁵ Therefore, in this tale, Spanish individuals could be expected to encourage not only licentiousness, but conversion, transvestism, and the abandonment of one's national loyalty. The supposed involvement of a South Sea Company clerk with this Spanish criminal further reinforced earlier questions about the possible destructive nature of sustained contact between British and Spanish subjects. Living among Catholics could be damaging to Britons individually, and whether this occurred in the metropole or on the vulnerable edges of the empire it could damage the interests of the nation and empire as well, the tale communicated.

Catholicism posed a perceived threat from within Britain's own imperial borders as well as externally. Irish men and women traveled extensively in the West Indies and their presence in the British Empire—and sometimes the Spanish one as well—provided a significant cause for trepidation on the part of many Britons.⁵⁶ The Irish were troubling figures for many loyal to the

British Empire, especially in such a fluid and contested area as the growing European colonies in the Americas. Many Irish soldiers and sailors had been involved with the rebellions against the British, including the 1715 Jacobite uprising and several revolts in the West Indies, and their loyalty to the Catholic Church and related rejection of the state church of Great Britain made their allegiances questionable at best in the eyes of many.⁵⁷

Jonathan Dennis had extensive firsthand knowledge of the religious conflicts that periodically sparked between these empires, as the Inquisition launched a case against him. The Spanish had substantial reasons to complain of the effects of the close contact between the subjects of the two empires. The Spanish government and the church perceived the significant numbers of British Protestants living in and moving through the empire as agents of the slave trade as a potential threat to the Catholic Church and the souls of its congregants. In 1735, the South Sea Company received news that Dennis, then a factor at the Santiago de Cuba factory, had been accused by the Inquisition of interfering with Catholicism. In response to his position and the interest the Inquisition had in detaining him, the company ordered Dennis to flee Cuba for Jamaica.⁵⁸ The other Britons working in the area were troubled by Dennis's case, concerned that the same fate might befall them. Indeed, a report from another company employee recounted the story of a Spanish merchant who was imprisoned by the Inquisition for two decades before being found innocent, suggesting that anyone could fall prey to the institution.⁵⁹ The company asked the duke of Newcastle to intercede on their behalf with the Spanish ambassador, explaining that they feared that any "misunderstanding" that might occur between company employees and Catholic clergy might lead to imprisonment by the Inquisition and the seizure of company property by the Spanish, perhaps irreversibly.⁶⁰ Living among the Spanish was a necessity if Britons wished to profit from their extensive trade, but it brought with it very real dangers.

The details of Dennis's alleged crimes remain murky and contested. He had at that point been in the West Indies for over ten years.⁶¹ The Inquisition claimed that Dennis "refused to give up an English Youth who was willing to turn Roman Catholick" during his time in Cuba with the company.⁶² Dennis countered that the boy was Protestant from birth, and Dennis's only intervention was to keep him from becoming a Catholic. The controversy forced Dennis to retire out of the Spanish empire to Jamaica for some years.

Dennis was not the only British subject brought before the Inquisition for his alleged insults to the Catholic religion. A year before Dennis faced his

own case, South Sea Company factor Samuel Collit was accused of improper behavior. The Spanish prime minister, Joseph Patiño, and the bishop of Caracas complained that Collit committed multiple offenses, including the unnecessarily harsh correction of a slave that resulted in the man's death, and the detention of a Catholic youth. Collit hotly contested these accusations; he argued that he had been particularly careful not to offend the Inquisition during his time in the West Indies, not even speaking of religion among those who lived with him. He could not be supposed to have spoken against the Church, he suggested, because "English companions I had none," as his "servants were all Roman Catholicks, and observed strictly with the ordinance of that Church as can be proved whenever your Honrs please." He speculated that he was being punished for "turning out of the Factory an impudent, thievish and lying Irish boy, who a few days before was converted to the Roman Catholick religion."⁶³ Regardless of the truth of this statement, he reaffirmed his defense here, that the Spanish were the parties responsible for religious conversion, while he was blameless. This suggested that the Spanish might, at least in British eyes, use the Inquisition court to punish South Sea Company employees who transgressed in some way.

Having fled the Inquisition in Cuba, Dennis arrived in Jamaica to find a troubled island. The inhabitants had been complaining about the presence of Spanish subjects in the waters near them and even on land since the beginning of the treaty. In 1730, a small group of Spanish men were on the island, having been rescued from the *Genovesa*, a wrecked man-of-war. These men were given liberty to move about the area, but a letter writer complained that despite this kindness, "they cannot help discovering their spleen & resentment to the English nation & even insult us in our own country."⁶⁴ In this case, the conflicts between these two empires erupted in a violent and very immediate way. According to the Jamaican correspondent, the Spanish visitors began to terrorize the city of Kingston, driving the British inhabitants out of the streets. The foreigners, with no reported provocation, stabbed to death the keeper of a public house, and knocked down several other residents. Regardless of the veracity of these complaints about unprovoked Spanish violence, the reaction of the British inhabitants of Jamaica is telling. Clearly believing the Spanish to be capable of such transgressions of both international treaty and human decency, local Britons, "publicly talked of arming & taking their revenge."⁶⁵ This thirst for retribution was fueled both by the immediate violence of the Spanish soldiers and the fact that some of the townspeople had been prisoners in New Spain, and resented their own

treatment at the hands of the Spanish there. Only the close watch of a constant guard kept Kingston from erupting into more violence.

The Jamaican governor moved to confine all the Spanish who had been given freedom to travel the island, though the letter writer expressed a concern that these men might prove dangerous beyond their own ability to commit violence. The soldiers, he feared, had had ample time to observe the land and their fortifications, and to make calculations about the kind of force that might be needed to launch a successful Spanish takeover of the island. A Spanish officer was even reported to have observed that "it was a very fine Island but thinly peopled," crucial information for any possible military action against the British settlers that paralleled the sort of military intelligence that British travelers were encouraged to collect.⁶⁶ Already living geographically surrounded by a number of Spanish American holdings, the Jamaicans found themselves in a particularly vulnerable situation, and the invitation of Spanish subjects into their very towns was met with fear and threats that personal conflict could escalate into interimperial war.

Fears that British subjects might be tainted religiously by sustained contact with the Spanish also persisted from well before the *asiento* period. Regardless of their desire for profit, the British worried that their proximity to the Spanish might, through force or osmosis, lead to conversions of British subjects living in that empire. According to the allegations of a 1735 pamphlet, a Mr. Darroch, the factor whom Jonathan Dennis was meant to replace at Panama some years earlier, married a Peruvian Spanish woman and was a Roman Catholic, though it was unclear whether he converted before or after being hired. Darroch allegedly stole 20,000 dollars from the company.⁶⁷ Around the same time, the court of directors sent a lengthy letter to Keene concerning the state of their trade abroad, including an example of Spanish hostility against the Protestants in their midst. They reported that the Spanish took a former company carpenter named William Woodin from one of their vessels, only releasing him after he "wrote severall letters promising . . . to turn Roman Catholick and to instruct the Spanish in building ships."⁶⁸ The company complained that the Spanish were taking British subjects off their ships, but perhaps more worrisome was what the Spanish planned to do with those subjects, using them to strike a military and religious blow to one of the main areas of British economic activity. Having sent British subjects into Spanish American cities, the South Sea Company attempted to balance promoting the trade with the peril to British souls.

The religious conflict extended to the question of responsibility for the

souls of those enslaved African laborers whom the South Sea Company was bringing into the New World. Since early in the trade, the Spanish expressed concern that enslaved Africans who had previous contact with the British might be particularly difficult to convert to Catholicism.⁶⁹ The company objected to being asked to pay for the enslaved people's religious instruction in the West Indies. In 1718 the court of directors noted that the Spanish crown required the factory at Havana to baptize slaves into the Catholic Church and bury those who died before sale accordingly; if the factors could not get around this payment, the court instructed them, they should attempt to avoid it by selling the slaves quickly.⁷⁰ In 1735 a layman was appointed near Panama "to instruct the negroes in the Christian Faith, baptize them *in articulo mortis*, and bury them in holy ground."⁷¹ The company balked at paying this man, arguing that this expense should be borne by the Spanish crown. While they could not outright object to the Spanish converting their own slaves, they could avoid directly adding to the number of Catholics in the West Indies. Once an enslaved person had been officially brought into either the Protestant or Catholic religion, imperial interest in their fate grew substantially, particularly for the Spanish. In 1731, the Inquisition attempted to stop the sale of an enslaved Catholic woman whom the company factors at Havana planned to send to the British colonies, as she would be unable to practice her religion there.⁷² While Catholicism was insufficient to free an enslaved person in most cases, the Spanish crown and church felt that certain protections, including a guarantee of the ability to practice his or her religion, should be afforded to enslaved people who had been baptized.

Individuals moving between these empires could profitably appeal to the tensions between the Catholic and Protestant empires. This was the case with a group of slaves who came before the Cuban court in 1723. Miguel and Gaspar, two men of African descent, told a Cuban court that they were escapees from Jamaica who hoped to live among Catholics, and that in fact their Jamaican owner held them illegally. They fled to the Spanish islands during the war along with others, landing on the Cuban shore where the local people divided them up among the houses. They were actually free, they argued, and should be allowed to stay in the Spanish empire as free subjects. They positioned themselves as anti-British and pro-Catholic, demonstrating a clear strategy that took into account the imperial contexts in which they lived.⁷³ If they could convince the Spanish that they were working against their war-time enemies, these slaves hoped they might secure freedom from the Jamaicans.

Jonathan Dennis found British settlers in Jamaica confronting an even more persistent and local threat than that posed by pirates or Inquisition courts, in the form of escaped slaves. Since the British takeover of the island in 1655, former Spanish slaves and their descendants lived in the dense mountains of the interior, undertaking raids on plantations and encouraging local slaves to run away and join them.⁷⁴ Armed conflict between the British and these Maroon communities increased significantly in the 1730s, creating panic among the populace and raising the hopes of enslaved African laborers on Jamaican plantations. The presence of the Maroons put white Jamaicans in a particularly vulnerable position, and the imperial tensions and Maroon wars combined to create a difficult situation for the island, which now faced threats from within and without. Dennis left Cuba, where Spanish officials were hostile to his Protestant presence, only to live on an island beset by its own hostilities, violence that arose from the slave trade in which he himself engaged.

The South Sea Company, though it had imported some slaves that remained in Jamaica, did not contribute directly to the problem of the Maroons, but their involvement in the larger slaving business highlights the dangers inherent in transporting enslaved laborers into vulnerable imperial locations. Bringing British merchants into Spanish America was disruptive and damaging to the Spanish imperial system, especially in the eyes of Madrid and the Church. Bringing large numbers of slaves into the Americas was destabilizing as well, for both empires. The presence of large numbers of potentially hostile laborers in the American dominions of the British and Spanish meant that rebellion was perceived as a pervasive threat, and the periodic eruptions of violence between the empires stoked fears that enslaved populations could be used by one nation to deeply damage the other.

The British found the continual presence of the Maroons in the interior troubling enough, but as the *asiento* period continued and interimperial troubles mounted, the Maroon attacks on British settlements became, or seemed to become, more frequent and dangerous. The Maroons came into British towns and onto plantations in order to gather supplies and to bring enslaved Africans back to their communities. The *Jamaica Courant* informed readers that recently, despite the efforts of volunteer militiamen and their slaves, “a party of the rebels have fallen upon a settlement to the Windward of Port Antonio, plunder’d and burnt it, and carry’d off a negro woman and her child.” A speech given in the Jamaica Assembly emphasized the dangers faced by the people of the island, and the very real possibility that it could be lost

entirely: the incursions of the Maroons had become so troubling "that your frontiers that are no longer in any sort of security must be deserted, and then the danger must spread and come nearer, if not prevented."⁷⁵ While explorers and those in London dreamed of incorporating more and more of the Spanish holdings in the British Empire, some on the ground in the West Indies held fewer illusions about these borderlands.

After years of conflict with the Maroons, in 1733 the Jamaican government reported that the pressures of fighting the Maroons had become overwhelming. The fear of violence from the Maroons was, they said, so great that they had "determined several planters to abandon their plantations."⁷⁶ Some even worried about a general revolt by the enslaved population. These Jamaican plantations were situated in a particularly dangerous area, and one that was of critical importance to Britain. Trelawny saw this position clearly, writing that Jamaica "is a frontier place surrounded as it were with the settlements of France and Spain," which was of great "importance to Great Britain (the sugar trade and indeed to the whole trade to the West Indies chiefly depending upon its preservation)."⁷⁷ The difficult position of Jamaica, simultaneously near the geographical frontier and the economic center of the British Empire, made the fate of the island precarious but of particular interest to the British crown. With the Spanish periodically menacing their holdings from without, the threat from enslaved populations from within posed a particularly troubling threat.

Just as it could be difficult to identify illegal pirates and their ships at sea, so Jamaicans found themselves sometimes unable to distinguish between members of Maroon communities and the slaves moving legally about the island. There was little external to mark these individuals as runaways or rebels, and they might blend unnoticed into the markets of Kingston or Spanish Town if dressed like the overwhelmingly enslaved population of the island.⁷⁸ The difficulty of identifying Maroons on an island with a large number of slaves made the British Jamaicans all the more uncertain about their ability to contain or counter the threats to the lands they claimed as plantations.

In order to protect their interests on the island, the British government sent troops to Jamaica in the 1730s, recognizing that this was not just a local issue but one that affected the empire at large. White Jamaicans welcomed the soldiers, in no small part because they were largely unsuccessful in raising anything like a useful army on their own. The local colonial government had been organizing small groups of men to defend the plantations against the Maroons and to attack their remote settlements for many years. These groups

included not only local planters and their white servants, but also their African slaves. The inclusion of these slaves in expeditions against the “runaways” was troubling but necessary from the perspective of the settlers, who feared they might abandon the group in order to join the Maroons.⁷⁹ Jamaican officials attempted several times to recruit soldiers locally, promising them money for their time and a bounty on each enemy they killed, as well as land, slaves, and provisions.⁸⁰ Unfortunately for the white Jamaicans, their small population meant that few men could be counted upon to perform this service, and at times they ignored the orders of their officers, making their efforts ineffectual.⁸¹

British troops faced problems beyond their lack of success against the Maroon raids. Soldiers sent from London suffered in large numbers from tropical diseases to which they had no previous resistance. The soldiers were disheartened by a combination of the extreme heat and humidity of the area, the illnesses and insects, and the consistent difficulty that Britons faced in fighting a group much more familiar with the mountains. Colonel Cornwallis put the situation into perspective clearly in a letter to London from Port Royal, noting that “I’m sure there is not an officer here but with pleasure would go to the most desperate siege rather than stay in this damned unwholesome place, for then one should have a chance to gain some credit or die honorably, here no reputation to be gained & no service to be done.”⁸² Another soldier observed of the regiment that “the climate is too inveterate an enemy for them,” far worse than the “rebel slaves” alone would be.⁸³ These conditions would cause repeated problems during Caribbean warfare against internal and foreign enemies.

Maroon raids in Jamaica were only a small part of the larger wave of rebellions occurring throughout Europe and the Americas in the first half of the eighteenth century, from slaves fleeing British colonies for Spanish Florida to political rebellions in Great Britain. The Spanish empire faced its own problems with slave rebellions throughout their colonies. For instance, at the Cobre mines in Cuba, the slaves rose up and declared themselves free in 1731, and five years earlier slaves on nearby plantations revolted in response to the proximity of British ships, which they hoped would lead to their freedom.⁸⁴ The Spanish case suggests that enslaved laborers were both aware of and eager to exploit conflicts between the two empires to their own advantage.

The British saw clear and direct connections between their problems with the Maroons and increased conflicts with the Spanish empire over the contraband trade and piratical depredations that so vexed the South Sea

Company. Rumors abounded that the Spanish and Maroons were collaborating in their designs against the British control of Jamaica. The settlers did not create these concerns out of whole cloth—the Spanish subjects in the area jumped at the opportunity to stoke British paranoia. From Jamaica, one military official wrote that the arms and ammunition that the rebels possessed was a clear indication they had “a secret correspondence within the island, or from abroad, perhaps both.”⁸⁵ A British sea captain noted that while on a trading voyage to Cuba, several Spanish men informed him that they would soon be in control of Jamaica, as “the runaway negroes of this island had wrote to the Governor of Cracas that if the King of Spain would send some people to take this island, they would deliver them up possession of it.”⁸⁶ These Maroon communities would reportedly then “enjoy the same libertys as the rest of [the Spanish King’s] subjects.”⁸⁷ In 1731, Governor Hunter alerted Newcastle that forces on Jamaica captured a rebel enslaved woman who confirmed that one of the Maroon captains was in contact with the Spanish, giving them information about their position and numbers and offering an alliance against the British. Hunter solemnly noted that this confirmed the old suspicions: “there can remain no doubt of their correspondence with and encouragement from the Spaniards.”⁸⁸ Other accounts of Spanish boasting about the weakness of Jamaica circulated as early as 1730.⁸⁹ A 1737 report from Jamaica, relayed to the government in London through an intermediary in Charleston, told of a Spanish plan for a joint attack on Georgia and attempt to “excite an insurrection of the negroes of this province” of South Carolina, suggesting that the problems Jamaicans faced with escaped slaves could easily translate to the mainland.⁹⁰ The slave trade had been the basis of a close connection between the South Sea Company and the Spanish empire; here, in a time of growing crisis, those Britons living in the West Indies expressed concern that it might lead to an insurmountable crisis. The growing unrest with Spain was partially created by tensions with the company and the disruption that could be caused by slaves that they and private traders brought to both empires. These tensions could erupt into an attack from two fronts, which could lead to the loss of Jamaica and other important colonial holdings.

The British expressed relief when Cudjoe, the leader of one of the biggest Maroon communities in Jamaica, agreed to a peace treaty just before the War of Jenkins’s Ear broke out with Spain.⁹¹ If the weakened island was forced to face the Spanish and the Maroon communities at the same time, their resources may well have been exhausted. Following the war, an anonymous

Jamaican observed the benefits gained by the timing of the Maroon treaty: "I shall leave every one to conjecture what the condition of Jamaica would have been when threatened with a Foreign invasion surrounded w Enemies and but a small force to defend itt for a long time if than they hade hade such Enemies within their bowels to have excited and supported their slaves in a Rebellion."⁹² The settlers and Maroons reached an agreement, signed in March 1739, which allowed them to avoid this condition. Indeed, during the subsequent war with Spain, Cudjoe sent a lieutenant to receive instructions from the governor of Jamaica for how the Maroon troops should be positioned to defend the island in case of a Spanish invasion.⁹³ Despite this easing of tensions in Jamaica, however, rumors of Spanish involvement, as instigators or as a refuge for rebelling slaves, arose in other parts of the British Empire, with possible slave uprisings and well-publicized executions in South Carolina in 1739 and New York City in 1741.⁹⁴

The disruptions to trade and planting that slave revolts caused within both empires increased interimperial stresses in the region. The slave trade brought together these empires as they sought mutual benefits: the Spanish would take in sufficient labor for their mines, households, and fields, and the British, with their existing foothold on the African coast, could command Spanish specie in return for importing enslaved laborers. The large groups of slaves that were imported as part of the *asiento* treaty and the larger slave trade had their own ideas about their position in the American colonies, and might, as in the case of the Maroons, organize and fight for their interests. Once these African men and women were brought to the Americas, their potential power as actors became strikingly clear to Europeans living in both empires. The very trade that brought the Spanish and British into cooperation in the Americas introduced another group, with its own agendas, that would also act to shape the colonies. In the late 1730s, the British, especially those with trading interests in the Caribbean and those living on the island of Jamaica, shifted their attention from concern about the actions of internal enemies firmly to the external threat of Spanish conflict.

The Slide Toward War

As tensions between the empires mounted throughout the *asiento* period, the South Sea Company factors, while often interacting closely with Spanish subjects as fellow traders and sometimes as friends, did come into contact in

some ports with Spanish officials who did not embrace their presence. Upon meeting the governor of Puerto Rico and delivering him letters from the governor of Jamaica in 1730, a British lieutenant named Sommerset Master asked to see the "English Factory" and meet the factors living there. In his declaration concerning this interaction, Master reported that the Spanish governor "refused, saying they were not to be trusted." The governor further expressed concern about the activities unfolding on Jamaica, as he had news of several regiments of British soldiers coming to the island. In addition to the distrust that existed between these two representatives of their empires, their communication was hindered by the language barrier. Master indicated that the governor "could get no other interpreter than a Dutch Negroe who spoke very bad English," an issue that likely also thwarted attempts at nuanced communication with the factors living on the island.⁹⁵

Despite the distrust of some Spanish officials, British factors were at times able to get information on their host empire because of their positions. This was especially useful and important as the relationship between the two empires deteriorated. Leonard Cocke, for example, a factor at Santiago de Cuba, reported an interaction he had in late 1736. There was a man in town claiming to be Irish and calling himself by the name Don Miguel Wall. The island's governor welcomed him. Intrigued by his presence and his purported command of a man-of-war, Cocke invited the man to dine with him at the factory. Plying the man for information, "finding him a free facetious gentleman, & that loved his glass," Cocke was able to discover that Wall was actually a former English lieutenant, and that his orders from the Spanish crown were to attack the recently formed Georgia settlement with the help of local Indians and runaway slaves.⁹⁶ Alarmed, the factor urged his British correspondent to alert the officials in Georgia in order to prevent this potential attack.

The South Sea Company complained heartily to the British king during this period, arguing that the situation with the Spanish had reached an impasse, and that they could not be expected to make any profits given the hostility of the Spanish government in Madrid and the New World. The local Spanish governments in the Americas took steps during the 1730s that the court of directors thought contradicted the agreement provided in the 1713 and 1716 treaties. In 1732 the Spanish government required the company's factors living at Panama to leave for Portobello. Only the chief of the Panama factory was allowed, by special dispensation from the local judge conservator, to remain there and continue to oversee trade.⁹⁷ In combining the two factories, the Spanish government also insisted that the total number of

Britons in the area be reduced.⁹⁸ The court argued that, in addition to a violation of the guaranteed allowance for a factory at Panama by the Spanish, Portobello had little to recommend it over the nearby city, as Portobello, “being so unhealthy would cause great mortality among the negros & destroy the factors.” The viceroy of Peru further attempted to hurt the South Sea Company’s trade by keeping specie from reaching the city, while the court noted that the company was authorized by Madrid to receive and trans-ship “money, bars of silver & ingots of gold” on their own vessels in return for providing enslaved African laborers.⁹⁹

The subgovernor of the company complained on the record that these interferences on the part of the local Spanish governments in the Americas were destroying the trade. While “it is certainly in itself a profitable commerce, and in many respects beneficial to the nation,” the trade, and the opportunity some believed it still provided for the nation, was gravely damaged. He speculated that the Spanish wished the trade to fail for their own reasons: “it must be allow’d that the Spanish have not only twice seiz’d & confiscated the company’s effects on pretence of war, but having been made sensible of the great advantages the company and nation might reap from it, have perhaps for that reason too, found frequent means to interrupt the returns, and thereby disappoint the expected gains.”¹⁰⁰ The company officially complained to the king several years later, finding its position in the West Indies very precarious. The Spanish, the company claimed, were violating many of the terms of the *asiento* flagrantly and in full knowledge of the illegality of their actions. The Spanish governors sold slaves they seized, rather than funneling them through the factors as specified. They detained ships, both at sea through *guardacostas* and within Spanish ports. The Spanish ambassador informed the court that they were no longer to send any goods on the annual permission ship that had not been produced in Great Britain, which the court complained would be “highly injurious” to their profits from those ships. Most salient for the factors living within the Spanish empire, in order to enforce rules made contrary to the treaty, “guards have been put by the Spanish officers on the Factors House and person, and our ships have been detained there till such orders were complied with.”¹⁰¹ As official problems increased, opportunities for interpersonal interaction and cooperation withered.

During this tumultuous time, some Britons held out hope that the trade with the Spanish could be continued and could be profitable. One unnamed correspondent with the company encouraged attention to Caracas, where a

factory was finally founded in 1735. Though some argued that there was insufficient demand for slaves in the area, the correspondent indicated that private trade was meeting with significant success and that a factory would benefit the company and help to counter Dutch presence in the region.¹⁰² Despite this move to expand operations in the West Indies, a major break between the Spanish and British empires seemed inevitable to many, and public sentiment in Britain was largely set against the Spanish.

Even in this later period, religious and secular disputes between the British and Spanish were not always insurmountable when there were profits to be had. Apparently, by 1738 the company felt that Dennis could live among the Spanish without posing a threat either to their property or to his safety. In that year the court of directors decided to place Dennis as first factor at Panama, having reached an agreement with some Spanish officials that he could work for the company as long as he stayed well away from Cuba.¹⁰³ There was some delay in the implementation of the order, as the president of Panama demanded a *cedula* from the Spanish king be issued before he allowed Dennis to even land at Portobello.¹⁰⁴ Edward Manning and John Merewether, the company's main factors in Jamaica, expressed their sympathy in a letter to Peter Burrell, sub-governor of the company, bemoaning "poor Mr. Denniss" and "how unfortunate he has been through the whole time of his being in the Compys service." Given this, Manning wrote, Dennis's reluctance to go to Panama without assurances that he would be safe was entirely justified: "it would be hard fate to remain the last five years of the Asiento Contract in a Spanish Goal [sic]."¹⁰⁵ Multiple orders had to be sent before he could finally be admitted to his post.¹⁰⁶

Despite the growing tumult in the West Indies and the high tension between the governments of the British and Spanish empires, Dennis returned to Spanish America. He encountered multiple problems in taking up his new post. Finally, in February of 1739, Dennis reported to Burrell that "notwithstanding the apprehensions I had"—apparently his past experiences with Spanish officials left him a bit shaken—"nothing could be more civil and handsome than the reception I met with" at Portobello and Panama.¹⁰⁷ He did not have long to enjoy his reestablishment in the Spanish empire. Shortly after finally being allowed into the Panama factory, on the night of June 18, 1739, Dennis died of an "appoplectick fitt."¹⁰⁸ He did not live to see the ultimate destruction of Anglo-Spanish cooperation, but by the time of his death the crumbling of the alliance was well under way.

The religious conflicts, secular issues such as contraband, and internal

pressures created by the presence of slave communities contributed to the deterioration of cooperation in trade in the Americas. The very closeness of empires and individuals made possible by the South Sea Company's contract with the Spanish, including the situation of Protestant Britons in Spanish American cities, led to pressures on the company agents involved and the empires themselves. As the 1730s came to a close, so did the wealth of opportunities for direct, intensive interaction of the British and Spanish in Spain's American empire.

CHAPTER 4

The End of the British Asiento, 1739–1748

In the years leading up to the War of Jenkins's Ear, the situation in the West Indies between Britain and Spain steadily deteriorated. Even as they lined their pockets through the contraband trade and by navigating the ambiguous edges of empire, agents of interimperial trade corroded cooperation by exploiting the contact between empires, along with pirates, *guardacostas*, and others. The South Sea Company employees who lived in the Spanish Americas certainly felt this shift, but the crumbling of the official trade did not mean an end to contact or commerce with the Spanish for all involved. Some company employees continued to take advantage of their Spanish American contacts long into and even after the war, though with more difficulty than under the *asiento*. Despite the conflict between the empires, Spanish trade and society retained some allure for these British traders, continuing to complicate imperial loyalties. During the *asiento* period, the people of both empires experienced an official and legal trade between the empires that offered new opportunities for individual profit, in ways that at times conflicted with supporting the policies of their empires. Even as some Britons were able to briefly continue to make use of their Spanish American contacts and imperial knowledge, connections with the enemy and presence on Spanish American shores became more dangerous in wartime. Those who represented the hopes for the British Empire on the ground would find their positions precarious as official cooperation broke down.

One of the most active agents in creating and maintaining contact with the Spanish was company factor James Houstoun, born in Scotland around 1690. Houstoun, like so many of his countrymen, pursued medicine at Edinburgh before leaving Scotland to pursue his fortune. He traveled widely in order to complete his education, including to Holland and France, where he indulged his tendencies toward drunkenness and licentiousness and

demonstrated his ability to make both fast friends and sworn enemies.¹ After his training, Houstoun joined the Royal African Company on the West African Coast, monitoring the health of the slaves purchased there for sale to the American colonies. The company found him particularly valuable because of his knowledge of smallpox, which could be quite destructive to slave cargoes. By 1724 Houstoun, having “suffered very grievous Hardships” under one of the Royal African Company agents in Whydah, decided to try his luck in the Americas.² Having been introduced to company officials by the duke of Chandos, an influential figure in the Royal African Company, he accepted the position of surgeon in the South Sea Company’s factory at Cartagena.³ Houstoun spent most of the next fifteen years in the West Indies, where he pursued his fortune, forged close relationships with friends from many nations and walks of life, and continued to ensure the health of the slaves who were transferred from Africa into the Spanish empire. The record of his exploits in the West Indies, preserved in multiple memoirs, provides a strikingly full picture of the *asiento* trade and the Spanish Americas from the perspective of a man with a long experience of travel.⁴ Houstoun’s publications are part travel writing, part self-aggrandizement, and part encouragement to the British Empire to reinitiate trade with the Spanish, support the slave trade, and continue to expand geographically.

Houstoun’s memoirs describe a life of travel and observation, one that allows any reader of his works access to his own opinions and memories of the South Sea Company’s factories and Spanish American ports, a very different sort of history than is preserved in the official records and correspondence. Houstoun’s relationships with individual subjects of both the British and Spanish empires allowed him to play a part in local diplomacy as an agent of transcultural and transimperial interpretation. While many of the claims Houstoun made in his writings cannot be verified by other historical sources, and some of his descriptions of his role in the West Indies are doubtless inflated or skewed to serve his own ego or political purposes, his explanations of his life in the Spanish Americas give readers an unusually comprehensive view of the experiences possible for South Sea Company agents in the Spanish empire’s ports.

Perhaps in defense of Houstoun’s Scottish birth in the difficult political climate after the 1745 Jacobite uprising, he expressed a fierce loyalty to the British crown. He praised the Act of Union that joined Scotland and England at some length in his *Memoirs*, writing, “I thank God I was a free-born subject of the Island of Great Britain, the two nations now united in one

monarchy, limited by our constitutional laws, under one parliament . . . the distinction and names of English and Scots quite obliterated.”⁵ He found the possibilities for trade to the growing American colonies encouraging for Scotland as well as for England, arguing that “the advantages accruing to Scotland from the liberty and freedom of trade . . . since the union . . . might have amounted to a greater sum than the value of the whole property of the kingdom of Scotland.”⁶ Indeed, many Scots, especially Scottish physicians, flocked to the British West Indian colonies to hold positions of authority in cities and on plantations.⁷ Houstoun’s attitudes echoed those of other Scottish individuals who were enthusiastic trumpeters of English political ideals; he wrote that “ever since I have been capable of knowing and distinguishing what Government was, I have been fixt in my Opinion, that mixt Government, as now established by the British Constitution, is the best.”⁸ Even before his time in the West Indies complicated his loyalties, Houstoun faced a dual national and imperial set of obligations: to his Scottish heritage and to the British Empire that allowed him to travel so widely and participate in the gains available to a large political, military, and economic force. Multiple, sometimes competing, national and imperial identities were the norm for many in the West Indies.

Houstoun’s own lack of religious enthusiasm did not translate to an agnostic view toward the Protestant-Catholic conflict. While he formed close relationships with Spanish individuals and even officials during his time in the West Indies, Houstoun retained at least an outward disdain for the Spanish political and religious systems and the contrast they provided to English forms of government. Though not particularly religious himself, to the dismay of his Presbyterian parents, he joined his fellow Protestants in roundly denouncing the Catholic Church and the dangers it posed for Britain.⁹ He celebrated the happiness of his countrymen, in contrast to “the Misery of those, who are subjected by Birth to the Tyranny of an absolute civil Power, and the Slavery of an Ecclesiastic Yoke.”¹⁰ In Houstoun’s view, the failures of the Spanish empire lay both in a lack of political freedom and in a dangerous attachment to Roman Catholicism and its rigid tenets.

Houstoun had long been enthusiastic about the possibilities for the West Indies, regretting the failure of the Darien colony and supporting the union of crown and trade. Indeed, the travel that Houstoun could engage in within the British Empire fed a deep need in him; he explained to readers that from his “very Infancy, [he] had a strange itch and curiosity for rambling and seeing the world, which continued with me all my lifetime.” Having worked both

in Africa and the Americas, Houstoun praised the company's slaving activities as "one of the *best Branches* of our national Trade," one to be promoted.¹¹ His time in the West Indies cemented for him the importance of Spanish American interests to the prosperity of Britain, though as with many factors he was quick to ignore these interests when it would not benefit him personally. Happy to support the empire in his writings and when he found it useful, Houstoun engaged in an active contraband trade that he did not find necessary to hide from readers. In the employ of the South Sea Company, Houstoun could support the interests of his empire, but on the ground in the Americas the attractions of forming closer connections to the Spanish empire for personal gain, regardless of the impact on the company's trade, would become clear.

Life in the Cartagena Factory

Houstoun's early experiences with the South Sea Company in the Spanish Americas were crucial to forming his opinions of his own empire and shaping the relationships that he would continue to draw on even in wartime. Houstoun sailed for Cartagena in 1724, and began his travels with very high hopes.¹² He later reported that he wanted to like his colleagues at the Cartagena factory, "expecting to meet with abroad a set of gentlemen of good education, thinking they could be nothing less who were distinguished with such honorable and profitable employments." He ended up quite disappointed, as none of the factors he encountered had, in his opinion, "the least tincture of a gentleman in him." They were even cruder than the factors he lived with on the coast of Africa, engaging in indecent and "shocking" conversation that Houstoun disdained.¹³ This is particularly striking when considering that Royal African Company factors were notoriously low in origin and deportment. One historian has described them as middling "young, ambitious, and often scurrilous" men, or "the dregs of society," and the factory there as seeming like "more a reformatory than a warehouse."¹⁴ While some of the South Sea Company factors held a slightly higher social position than their counterparts on the African coast, they lacked refinement, business sense, and social graces. Despite sharing their obligations and loyalties to the British crown, their common language, and Protestantism, Houstoun and these factors immediately found themselves disliking one another.

While some historians have documented an increasing national self-identification and unity among Britons in the metropole in the century after the Act of Union, Houstoun's experiences and observations suggest a very different picture in the far reaches of the empire.¹⁵ His memoirs explained what he described as a common problem among the British: "if you find five, six, or more people in a factory, you'll certainly see them pulling so many different ways."¹⁶ The factors he worked alongside could not agree among themselves, and were generally rough and quarrelsome. Though at the national level Houstoun made a great deal of the unity of Great Britain, celebrating the breakdown of Scottish and English distinctions on the island such that "all the inhabitants thereof, by one common name, [were] re-assuming the name of the antient primitive natives, Britons," in colonial outposts, interpersonal conflict could easily undermine that national unity where it might have mattered most: in front of foreigners.¹⁷

By Houstoun's account, the South Sea Company was plagued by poor decision making in all its endeavors, from the infamous stock fiasco that created the bubble of the early 1720s to the choice of which men to send into the company's service in the Spanish Americas. As detractors warned at the signing of the treaty, if Britain meant for the company to increase wealth and power in the Americas, the improper choice of the men who would actually carry out their business on the ground posed a threat to the formation of a trade-based empire on the edges of Spanish territories. There was neither rhyme nor reason to the choice of factors, it seemed; rather, patronage and arbitrary luck determined who would represent the court of directors' interests abroad. Houstoun grumbled that "You'll find a Bacallao [salt-fish] Merchant amongst the principal factors, because he can talk a little Spanish; a mere Tarr, bred before the mast, because he has a friend in the Court of Directors, that makes a bawling noise in it, and will be heard;—a broken tradesman, because he is represented as an object of charity, and must be provided for out of compassion;—a young gentleman, who has been at the Academy, and learnt to ride the Great-Horse, dance, &c. because he is recommended from the Court; with et-ceteras in abundance!"¹⁸ Houstoun here criticizes the factors regardless of their class status. While he might appreciate the company of the gentleman, that gentleman was considered as unsuited to the trade as was the "mere Tarr," and the presence of either of these incompetent types would do damage to both the factory and the trading interests of the nation. The factors were uncouth and embarrassing, as far as Houstoun represented them to his readers.¹⁹ In addition to being ill-suited to international

trade, these men were not trained in any meaningful sense for their duties abroad.

Houstoun disdained the residents of the British colonies as much as his fellow factors; his criticisms were by no means limited to the agents of the South Sea Company. The problem he saw with Britons was not unique to or sparked by the mismanagement of the court of directors. Rather, he characterized it as “the old Foible, division among ourselves, [which is] peculiar to the British nation, as I have frequently mentioned, and always observed, [and which] appears in lively Colours in our factories abroad.”²⁰ Certainly, as a long-time resident of the Spanish Americas he surely must have witnessed the deep divisions within that empire as well, between crown and local interests, secular and religious authorities, and others. These issues inhered in the nations, only becoming more pronounced and problematic on the edges of empire. The people who lived in Jamaica were, in Houstoun’s opinion, “the refuse of the British nation, intermixed with some Irish, and they, for the most part, Roman Catholicks in disguise.” They were unpleasant to be around, and vicious in their businesses, “living almost like a parcel of men-eaters devouring one another; the greater eating up the lesser.”²¹ Houstoun’s marked distaste for some of his fellow Britons and the affinity he demonstrated for the Spanish individuals he encountered suggests a tension in the connection between interpersonal relationships and national identification or loyalty in this area. Houstoun, and others like him, were being offered in the Caribbean close contact with a technically oppositional but actually quite pleasant group among the Spanish, and they were drawn to them. In the absence of real coherence in the British community in the Caribbean, the draw of the Spaniards proved strong in different ways for company agents such as Houstoun and John Burnet. These internal conflicts, and the trouble they caused for the company and the nation, demonstrate the difficulty of constructing empires that were, after all, made up of people with their own very definite agendas.

Houstoun’s observations about the particular disunity among Britons on the edges of the empire were reinforced in the records of the South Sea Company, which confirm that conflict was often a problem in foreign ports. The Buenos Aires factory proved to be a site of particular contentiousness. The fighting began on the ship from England, with the chief factor John Brown keeping his colleagues out of his private cabin while allowing his own servants to sleep there, and continued right through their time in the city. They fought about business, including who would bring a group of slaves to Chile

for sale. They fought about the price of slaves. They fought over who had access to what documents and who held what kind of authority.²² They even, perhaps most viciously, fought over who could have dinner with whom.

The Spanish American residents of Buenos Aires noticed the divisions within the factory, and particularly Brown's hostile attitude. The factory's bookkeeper, Francis Humphreys, bemoaned the "scandalous circumstance" in which company servants found themselves "forced to sue, and glad to accept of Defence and protection from the Spaniards themselves, against the very person whom they have invested with superior trust and power." Humphreys appears less enthusiastic than Houstoun about seeking comfort and social contact among the Spanish. Still, this sort of contact was necessary, especially given the tenuous position of the Buenos Aires factory, far from British settlements and at the mercy of local Spanish subjects for support. This was distressing to the factors individually, but it was also potentially damaging to the company. The Spanish subjects living in Buenos Aires certainly recognized that the resident Britons could not abide each other, which lowered local opinions of the men and their business. If things were to continue as they had been and Brown's attitude affected the Spanish traders, Humphreys feared, there was no telling "how lessening and prejudicial this may prove in its consequence to the credit and service of the Honble Court in this place."²³ The directors could do little to influence the opinions of Spaniards several thousand miles distant.

Though this is one of the most colorful incidents of strife within South Sea Company factories preserved in the records of the court of directors, it is far from the only time that these Britons clashed. In 1723, the court of directors wrote to the Panama factory in order to "rectify their conduct" there, admonishing them that any further differences among the factors should be reported directly to the company's men at Jamaica, who would settle the matter impartially.²⁴ Being British, perhaps even patriots, did not make the men at these South Sea Company factories into personal friends or even reliable colleagues. The disunity evident among Britons here caused significant problems within the South Sea Company, which was already facing financial difficulties in the early 1720s. The company intervened from time to time by removing factors from their posts, but this created difficulties in continuing the trade and forming lasting relationships with trading partners.²⁵

As much as he disliked his British companions, Houstoun could not do without social and trading partners. His gregarious nature made his entry into the Spanish society of Cartagena both logical and fairly easy. He reports

to his readers that he “had a large field for conversation among the Spaniards . . . who have the best and strongest Genius of all nations for intrigues.” In the time that he did not spend providing medical care to the slaves moving through the factory, he socialized heavily with the Spanish subjects of the city, “especially the ladies.” Among the Spanish men and women of Cartagena, Houstoun undertook the twin projects of learning the Spanish language and making fun of the British factors he so disliked.²⁶ He made close friends among the Spanish, and appears to have had in-depth discussions with either his social circle or trading partners regarding the workings of the Spanish empire and its financial problems. He writes that “all the time I lived amongst them at Cartagena, near ten years, there was never one piece of eight, in the Royal Chests of the King’s revenues . . . to my certain knowledge.”²⁷ Someone felt Houstoun was a close enough friend, or an unthreatening enough member of the British Empire, to confess the economic shortfalls experienced by the Kingdom of New Granada.

In addition to capturing a particularly detailed set of reactions to Britons and Spaniards in the Americas, Houstoun’s memoir provides a rare opportunity to reconstruct the feelings of one slave-trading agent toward the African individuals who made up his cargo. The vast majority of the surviving documents produced by the company’s employees abroad say very little about their experiences with or attitudes toward the slaves they traded. Houstoun’s writings reflecting on his time with the Royal African Company portray Africans in an almost unrelentingly negative light. While he lived in Sierra Leone, Houstoun encountered many Africans, both as enslaved labor to be exported and as individuals living and working within the company’s factory. He observed their habits and their foods, and spoke with them. When it came time to report his observations on the people of Sierra Leone to the company, he revealed his disdain, writing, “their natural Temper is barbarously cruel, selfish, and deceitful, and their Government equally barbarous and uncivil.” While these are in some ways similar to the criticisms that Houstoun leveled against his British compatriots, he goes on to describe the Africans even more harshly, saying that “as for their customs, they exactly resemble their fellow Creatures and Natives, the Monkeys.”²⁸ Perhaps unsurprising because of his role in the slave trade, to Houstoun, most Africans were only marginally distinguishable from animals, suggesting a significant difference between the way that he evaluated competing Europeans and African “outsiders.” South Sea Company employees, as slave merchants, could have much more positive opinions and friendly relations with formerly

enemy Europeans than with the enslaved Africans both European groups joined to exploit.

Houstoun traveled in the area around Cartagena during his time there, and he made friends widely. Despite his initial denigration of the inhabitants of the Cartagena factory, he did encounter some Britons with whom he was willing to spend time. During the first years of his tenure with the South Sea Company he formed a friendship with an unnamed supercargo for one of the annual ships that visited the port. While he gently chided this man in his memoirs for his vanity, he appeared to be the best British company available in the area, and the two men traveled to Portobello together, intending to go to the annual trading fair. While there they were caught up in one of the periodic conflicts between the British and Spanish. This was the Anglo-Spanish War. As far as Houstoun was concerned, it was less a war, and “more like a Sham, than anything else,” though it temporarily halted the trade and resulted in the seizure of company goods.²⁹ Here the close relationships and trust that Houstoun forged with the Spanish officials in the area became useful.

In 1726, the increasing tensions between the empires brought a British admiral and his fleet to Cartagena. Admiral Francis Hosier was involved in a great deal of smuggling in Cuba and Hispanola, and he was sent to interfere with Spanish shipping in the West Indies and protect the company permission ship the *Royal George*. This had the effect of protecting British shipping, both legal and contraband, while limiting the Spanish response and hindering their own shipping.³⁰ Houstoun, positioning himself at the side of Don Francisco Cornejo, the commander of the Spanish galleons, reported that he assisted with the translations of the official correspondence that passed between Cornejo and Hosier. Houstoun was not the only non-Spaniard to mediate between the empires in this way; on the Spanish side the job of translation was done by an Irishman, Father Daniel O’Hony, who had been aboard with the admiral for some time.³¹ Houstoun chided the priest for his poor translations of the letters that were exchanged. This came in the form of a barb specifically about O’Hony’s rejection of loyalty to his imperial obligations: “I told Don Daniel, that he had forgot his English.”³²

Considering the long history of conflict between the British and Spanish at the national and imperial levels, Houstoun’s attitude toward, and indeed, assistance to, the Spanish admiral seems striking. In his memoirs, his affinity for a gentlemanly manner seems more relevant to his feelings toward individuals than their national origin. This is particularly stark in his comparison

of the two admirals: “Don Fransisco was a polite gentleman, a good officer, one of strong natural understanding, and a man of honour and integrity; but our Admiral, was a mere rough, vulgar Tarr.”³³ While he did not know Hosier personally, Houstoun had many occasions to read the man’s correspondence to the Spanish general, and snidely informed the readers of his memoir that “had a School-boy under my Care wrote such Letters, I would have ordered him to be whipt.” The man’s uncouth nature did not challenge Houstoun’s own national identification or loyalty—he was still “our” Admiral—but neither did Houstoun gloss over his faults in consideration of the man’s station. In contrast, Houstoun lavished praise on the governor of Cartagena, Don Luis Aponte, who, he insisted, “had more understanding in his little finger, than all our factory put together had in their whole body.”³⁴ The act of translating in itself does not necessarily imply that Houstoun was allying with the Spanish *against* his own empire—rather, it is most usefully understood as an act of transcultural and transimperial interpretation by someone who was in a particular position to grasp the nuances of both languages and cultural systems. As a liminal figure, Houstoun could engage both sides of the conflict, and his knowledge of the personalities of these men allowed him to provide service to both empires while potentially benefiting and enriching himself as a cosmopolitan operator not only between but above the divisions of empire.³⁵ While transimperial connections like Burnet’s might hurt the British Empire, other South Sea Company employees, like Houstoun, used their connections to try to broker peace when it suited them.

The profits that could accrue to an unscrupulous Briton from unauthorized trade to the Spanish empire were appealing, but the willingness of these men to ally themselves with the Spanish had some limits. The Spanish, Houstoun said, gave him opportunities to renounce his British attachments altogether, but he declined. After the 1728 Anglo-Spanish conflict forced him to retreat to Jamaica for a brief time, Houstoun returned to Cartagena and remained there for several more years as a surgeon, socializing freely and recording botanical observations that he thought might be of interest to the fellows of the Royal Society of London.³⁶ He appears to have made a significant impression upon the Spanish officials at Cartagena. When the court of directors again disbanded the factory in the middle of the 1730s and appointed new factors, Houstoun hesitated to leave. He related in his memoirs that the governor of Cartagena summoned him and offered him a chance to stay, with a salary paid by “the inhabitants of Cartagena.” Whether he actually received this offer or just found it convenient for his readers to believe that he did, his

description of the situation is telling. He wished his readers to understand the deep connections he developed in Spanish America, and the ways in which he profited from his time in the area. Houstoun may well have benefited from staying, as he had a considerable amount of money invested in trade in the city, but he ultimately declined for reasons he described as national loyalty: "if I stay, I must shake off my Country's protection, and put on the Spanish yoke."³⁷ This was an unacceptable compromise, and Houstoun moved to Jamaica to continue his West Indies trade as a subject of the British crown.

The intelligence Houstoun observed in the Spanish officials apparently extended to matters of diplomacy; despite the poor conduct of the British factors they were generally well-treated, and a few months into the conflict they were sent to Jamaica for the duration of the war.³⁸ Following the resolution of the war, in 1729, Houstoun petitioned the court to return him to the reestablished factory at Cartagena, and the committee agreed that he should be recommended for this.³⁹ By 1733, however, Houstoun fell out of favor with the company. The records are not specific regarding the accusations, but note that the concern was about Houstoun's "character." Cartagena factors Crowe and Ord gave reports to the Committee that "they were unanimous in their opinion that it might tend to the Companys prejudice to continue him," and the company agreed to send Thomas Hope to the Cartagena factory in his place.⁴⁰ Houstoun left the city grudgingly. He lost a great deal of the trade he had established with the College of Jesuits, a group notorious for smuggling.⁴¹ He continued to visit the Spanish American coast throughout the decade that followed. His experience of armed Anglo-Spanish conflict had not dampened his enthusiasm for life within the Spanish empire and the opportunities for trade and socialization that life offered.

While wars like that in 1727 interrupted the Anglo-Spanish cooperation made possible by the South Sea Company, Houstoun firmly believed that the British Empire could only benefit from maintaining the asiento trade to the Spanish Americas. The Spanish West Indian trade allowed Great Britain to dispose of many of its manufactured goods, and to acquire Spanish specie in return. On the other hand, Houstoun observed long after this conflict, "it is very natural and reasonable for a Spaniard, in the Commerce of Spain, to complain of the Trade of the annual Ship, as it affects and prejudices their Trade; for there's never any Thing bought of the Spaniards till the annual Ship's Cargo is sold off."⁴² Outside the official concerns of London and Madrid, the South Sea Company trade was causing disruptions for both Spanish traders and Englishmen working through Old Spain. The company's

monopoly, and its success in bringing goods to the ostensibly annual fair, had long meant reduced profits for others supplying the empire. As the final and conclusive war of the British *asiento* period erupted in 1739, however, what kind of trade relationship was possible or desirable between the nations was once again thrown into question for many on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Push for War

The War of Jenkins's Ear marked the end of an era in the West Indies, bringing the contact allowed by the *asiento* to a conclusion and eventually leading to further conflict between the British and Spanish empires. The war had a variety of causes. As several historians have outlined, the diplomatic history of the countries in question and the personalities of the various ministers involved deeply influenced the development of the war.⁴³ It is of directly related and at least equal significance that the War of Jenkins' Ear came as the result of poor decision making on the part of the South Sea Company and the insistence of the British public on retribution for the Spanish treatment of British merchants and sailors abroad.⁴⁴

Spanish imperial plans had long been at odds with British desire for expansion in land and trade. The Bourbons hoped for a complete monopoly in their own lands, a way to prevent valuable specie from flowing out of the empire. Granting the *asiento* to Britain was troubling in itself for those who supported these visions of Spanish imperial exclusivity, even as the arrangement benefited many on the ground in the Spanish Americas. Through the 1730s, the Spanish crown and some local officials complained bitterly of smuggling on British ships, which from their perspective necessitated the use of the *guardacostas*. While some Spanish Americans were eager to participate in the contraband trade, and some South Sea Company employees were happy to supply these markets, this illegal commerce caused tensions between official Spanish policy and activities in the colonies. In addition to these issues of trade and smuggling, the Spanish crown and nervous local officials complained of the British push for rights and territory in previously Spanish claims such as Campeche and Georgia.⁴⁵ These divisions between and among those living in the empire and the metropole influenced both British and Spanish imperial practices, and had long complicated the process of making and enforcing trade agreements.

By the late 1730s, complaints that were leveled during the treaty

negotiations reemerged strongly in British national discourse, from both imperial and personal standpoints.⁴⁶ Some argued that the asiento contract could never have brought Great Britain wealth, as those Europeans who had previously held the treaty “were always considerable losers thereby.” Even if the trade had potentially great profits, the company “have been yearly deficient some Thousands in the Number of Negroes which by the Contract they were obliged to furnish the Spaniards withal.”⁴⁷ Though incomplete company records and the extensive contraband trade make the actual numbers of enslaved laborers brought into the Spanish empire difficult to determine, the available numbers do appear to fall beneath the guidelines set by the asiento, and surely the company collected payments that did not reach expected levels.⁴⁸ In part, this may have been the fault of the men employed in the factories: one pamphleteer observed that “their Agents do not always make the Interest of the Company the absolute Standard of their Actions,” despite the company’s hopes when selecting them. The attention that men like James Houstoun paid to their own private trade, the author suggested, may have significantly damaged the company’s profits.⁴⁹ Given this failure of publicly acknowledged profits, the asiento seemed to be useless to some in Britain. If the agreement that kept Britain and Spain cooperating was ineffectual, there appeared to be little reason not to go to war.

Many participants in the lively print culture in Great Britain largely championed the British cause against Spain and supported military action in the West Indies. Indeed, fueled by outrage over Spanish depredations, the 1739 war was quite popular among Britons.⁵⁰ Mercantile interests throughout Britain’s empire were extremely vocal in protesting the nation’s policies toward the Spanish, pushing for immediate and significant action to defend their interests abroad.⁵¹ Numerous pamphlets published in the period surrounding the outbreak of the war echo the complaint that the Spanish were not only preventing Britain from enjoying its proper rights to lands and trade, but were overtly contemptuous toward the British in the West Indies; one pamphleteer went so far as to claim that the Spanish “have always upon the slightest Occasions, took every Opportunity of shewing themselves our enemies.”⁵² While the kinds of diplomatic and economic concerns that had been behind the 1718 and 1727 wars were also factors in the War of Jenkins’s Ear, here American threats loomed the largest.⁵³ British pamphleteer Micaiah Towgood encouraged his countrymen’s support for the war on the basis of the long-standing Black Legend of Spanish cruelty, combined with more recent complaints about Spanish religious intolerance and violence. Appealing

to a long history of negative beliefs about the Spanish, Towgood directed his readers' concerns across the Atlantic, writing that "the blood this cruel Nation hath split in Europe, is but a Rivulet, to the Ocean, with which it has deluged the American Lands" in the early days of conquest.⁵⁴ That Towgood was referencing the excesses of Spanish American conquistadors over two hundred years after the fact, in 1741, suggested some connections between the violence of the past and more recent damages. British blood was the ultimate impetus for interimperial rupture, as the eponymous Captain Jenkins's ear, severed as he claimed by Spanish ruffians, stirred martial feelings on the floor of Parliament.⁵⁵

By the later part of the 1730s, merchants regularly complained to the British government about the seizures the Spanish committed against their shipping. Some, driven by a growing interest in the empire among the British public, advocated immediate war as the only possible remedy to these insults to British power.⁵⁶ Though the government made numerous complaints to the court at Madrid, the responses were insufficient in the eyes of the merchants. Further, some Britons expressed concerns about the consolidation of Spanish power in the economically vital area of the West Indies: "we have the strongest Motives to think every Year will augment her Revenues, her Alliances, or Territories."⁵⁷ This certainly reflected Spanish hopes, as the Bourbons reformed the empire to increase their strength and modernize their fleet under Joseph Patiño, Spain's chief minister.⁵⁸ These expansions in the Spanish empire had already worn away at the holdings of others in Europe, and their growing strength in the Caribbean might lead to incursions onto British-held soil, in which the Spanish could "deprive us of our two favourite Colonies, which have already cost us Millions of Money to bring to Perfection."⁵⁹ Though war would inevitably interrupt the trade to the Americas, the gains were expected to make up for the losses. Britain was felt to be at a military, and especially naval, advantage: "as we must be ruin'd without a War, surely, it will be but common Prudence to attempt it against an Enemy so contemptible upon that Element, which is to be the Theatre."⁶⁰ Profit could only be secured, some Britons felt, through swift and violent military action.

As some clamored for war, many British pamphleteers continued to insist that their nation was in no way responsible for the tensions that had developed between the two empires. Echoing disclaimers made by the British during earlier piracy trials, an anonymous pamphleteer in 1739 insisted that the guilt of the two governments in the matter of piracy was in no way equivalent. On the

British side, those who committed piracy received no crown protection, whereas “the Crown of Spain avows, aids, and abets her Pirates, promotes them, and imputes the most cruel Excesses they can be guilty of towards the British Subjects to them as a Merit.”⁶¹ The British, this suggested, had tried reason and tact; now there was little option left but to go to war.

Many Britons seemed to believe that the Spanish were not only guilty of horrific violence against Britons and Native Americans, but that they celebrated the terrible insults made against their British counterparts. For instance, an anonymous pamphleteer took the opportunity in 1739 to “advance Facts upon Hear-say,” promoting a rumor that “the very Man who cut off Capt. Jenkins’s Ear was afterwards promoted from being a simple boatswain to the Command of a considerable ship” as a reward for perpetrating this “inhumane Cruelty.”⁶² In the writer’s estimation, these Spanish pirates were not fellow, reasonable Europeans to be negotiated with, but “inhuman,” and the only response that could be effective would be military.

In the late 1730s, British writers made a variety of arguments for significant changes to the way Britain’s affairs were being conducted in the West Indies, some suggesting strongly that the harm the Spanish brought to British shipping could only rightly be answered with violence. One 1739 pamphlet in particular, *The British Sailor’s Discovery*, contained many of the threads of discontent woven through other works. The unnamed author begins with an account of the Americas from the earliest European discovery, challenging Spain’s rights to its dominions. Coming to a more contemporary period, he details the well-known attacks of the Spanish on English shipping and trade, complaining that “without any Declaration of War being made between the two Nations in Europe, the Spaniards always behaved in a hostile Manner towards such of the English Subjects as came in their Way in the West-Indies.”⁶³ Those sailors seized by the Spanish, the author contended, were often victims of the Court of Inquisition, which could keep them captive or sentence them to death at its own whim. Beyond pointing out that Spain held areas that might, given the basis of Spanish claims in a fifteenth-century papal bull, rightfully be open to British settlement, and that Spanish subjects attacked British sailors, the author argues for a British takeover of more of Spain’s American lands. This call for British geographical expansion, present throughout the period and especially in times of Anglo-Spanish war, had a major resurgence in the 1730s. The present situation, in which British factors and traders entered Spanish-held territories to conduct their business, posed too many potential problems—indeed, the author noted, it created “the

utmost Danger, [for] the Souls of many young Traders” as well as threatening the “Lives and Fortunes of many Christian Brethren in America.”⁶⁴

Even those Britons captured by the Spanish who did not face the Inquisitional courts suffered unduly, as their countrymen saw it. The highly active British print culture produced dozens of books and pamphlets decrying the British merchant’s situation in the West Indies, particularly from the perspective of those concerned with the empire’s trade.⁶⁵ These publications called for action against the *guardacostas* and championing the cause of those merchants and sailors who failed to secure reparations, or who were held “in a worse than Turkish Slavery” by the Spanish. Though many of these Britons were seized while engaging in illegal contraband trade in Spanish waters, those who wrote on their behalf were more likely to attribute these Spanish detentions to “the natural Innate Hatred they bear us” than to any legitimate grievances on the part of the Spanish empire.⁶⁶ Despite early hopes about cooperation that might benefit both nations, by this period it appeared that peaceful trade and cooperation across clear imperial borders was not really possible.

Though the Spanish monarchy did not permit the sort of robust print culture that the British enjoyed in the eighteenth century, some arguments from the Spanish perspective did make it into publications. A variety of complaints about the British appeared in the anonymous pamphlet, *His Catholick Majesty’s Conduct Compared with that of His Britannick Majesty*, reportedly a reprint from a Spanish-language source and reproduced in both languages in 1739. The pamphlet noted naval aggression against the Spanish, as early in the war, King George II authorized British privateers to sail against the Spanish from Jamaica and seize any goods aboard their ships.⁶⁷ It also gave an account of the nongovernmental actions taken by British subjects against Spanish victims.

Just as stories about the violence and depredations of the Spanish caught British imaginations, so Spanish subjects alerted each other to the unusual violence and unchristian behavior of Britons in earlier conflicts. *His Catholic Majesty’s Conduct* countered tales of Spanish depredations with the story of a British subject who, before the 1727 war, boarded a South Sea Company ship in order to incite the enslaved Africans on board to insurrection against the Spanish, “offering them Liberty for a Reward, in case they, being united for that execrable Perfidy he exhorted them to, should plunder the Place and put to Sword the Inhabitants.” This alliance with the slaves against fellow Europeans was motivated, the pamphlet reported, by “that Spirit of Hatred and Rancour, which is predominant in the English nation against Spain, especially in America.”⁶⁸ If one Briton could take such extreme action against the Spanish,

surely the widespread dislike for the Spanish could lead to similar transgressions that would irrevocably damage interimperial interactions. As with the British stories of Spanish sins, the truth of this report is somewhat in doubt, and cannot be verified. Whatever the actual actions of this British subject, the fact that this sort of behavior toward the rival empire was thinkable indicates the danger that some Spanish subjects imagined the British posed to their presence in the Americas.

The attack on the morality of the British was almost identical to attacks being made on that of the Spanish. The pamphleteer lamented that “this barbarous example, to treat the Spaniards, during the Time of Peace, in such a Colony as Jamaica, with more inhumanity than the most detestable enemies, was follow’d by an English Captain, of those that infest our Coasts, no less by an illicit Trade than by their Wickedness.” In a chilling parallel to the Jenkins incident, the pamphleteer claimed that the English captain took two Spanish men on board his ship in order to ransom them. Failing at this, he took out his anger on his prisoners, as he “cut off the Ears and Nose of one of them, and putting a Dagger to his Breast, forc’d him to eat the same.”⁶⁹ If the Black Legend primed Britons to believe the worst of Spanish *guardacostas* and pirates roaming the West Indies, it is clear that the Spanish could and did expect comparable treatment.

Given the two imperial peoples’ opinions of one another, and knowing of past failures to achieve acceptable reparations from the Spanish, many Britons pushed for war. For years, British ministers turned to diplomatic channels to address problems in the West Indies. Negotiation seemed to have solved little over the two and a half decades of the asiento; one pamphleteer complained that those treaties “cost us six times as much as a Naval war would have done,” yet without solving the problems addressed.⁷⁰ Some in Britain focused more on principle than cost, objecting to treaty-making because they felt that asking for *cedulas* or signing agreements to end depredations and gain compensation for past seizures required an unacceptable official recognition of Spain’s claims to their rights to seize British ships.⁷¹ Because the Spanish were being unreasonable, from the perspective of many British merchants, treaties did more to restrict British action than to gain justice in disputes against *guardacostas* and pirates. In part, these merchants perceived the disadvantage to the British to arise from the weakness of the ministers. One pamphleteer complained that “it unfortunately happened, that those who ought to have defended our Rights, rather gave them up, from not understanding them.”⁷² These merchants felt that any further treaties aimed at solving the problem

would only result in more concessions to the Spanish on points that could not rightfully be conceded. Increased contact between the empires could only lead to trouble. The time for treaties, they argued, had passed: "A Commanding Force in those Seas alone can secure us."⁷³

The British expected at least a partial advantage: the Spanish court and navy could not hope to stand up to British might, many claimed. This was likely true at sea because, despite a growth in Spanish military power, their navy still remained far less developed than Britain's. An anonymous 1736 pamphlet framed this as a question not just of military advantage, but of moral superiority: "We wisely let Spain by their wilde and extravagant Politicks sufficiently reduce and impoverish themselves, while we, by our pacifick Forebearance, reap'd all the Benefits" of peace and trade with them.⁷⁴ Spain was weak, this suggested, while the British were strong, a view encouraging to the British even as they worried about Spanish power growing under the Bourbons. Some Britons were encouraged by the view of the Spanish empire as in decline after its initial success in taking over large areas of the Americas, and of the British Empire as an ever-growing power, with its mighty navy and even a divine right behind it.

The war did not reflect problems around trade disagreements alone, however. These armies and navies clashed too over the growing British settlements in North America, especially in Georgia and the Carolinas. In the 1730s British settlers established these colonies quite close to existing Spanish American settlements in violation of the 1670 treaty, causing distress on both sides.⁷⁵ The Spanish were concerned about encroachments onto lands to which they had legal claim, and accused the British of mistreating local native groups allied with the Spanish.⁷⁶ The Spanish had also been trying to expand their European holdings in Italy and elsewhere, suggesting to one pamphleteer that Spain aspired to "a universal Empire and Conquest," though this was a far more prevalent aspiration in an earlier age.⁷⁷ If Spain was successful in building their inferior military and naval capabilities, this might threaten British trade and settlement. Fears continued to circulate about the growth of the Spanish empire and its potential for taking over British lands in the future. Some felt that the *asiento* and related treaties were directly responsible for the difficulties faced in the late 1730s: "Spain is now more formidable than at the Time of signing the Treaty [of Seville], and that the Trade and Affairs of Great Britain are in a more languishing State."⁷⁸ Even as it threatened Spain's power over its possessions in the Americas, Britain remained extremely concerned about the possibility of a resurgence.⁷⁹

With the coming of the War of Jenkins's Ear, a number of Britons took the

opportunity to push for a reinvigoration of the earlier interest in taking over land, rather than just trade, from the Spanish in order to enlarge their empire. The knowledge they gleaned during the *asiento* period, while Britons were allowed to live and travel in the Spanish Americas, meant that they were particularly well equipped to make these plans. While war halted the official *asiento* trade, several writers publicized their suggestions for taking over the Spanish empire's territories. Several thought it likely they could do so with the help of both friendly native groups and Spanish creoles.⁸⁰ One scheme suggested that the creoles "are quite tired of the Government of the Spaniards" and might welcome a liberating influence. If the British did not succeed in shaking the tenuous loyalty of the creoles, the society could easily be destabilized in a different way; in that case, "it is propos'd, that a publication of freedom, should be made to all mullatoes, and negroes."⁸¹ Here, as in the First Maroon War and the concerns about runaway and revolting slaves throughout the British and Spanish empires, the presence of the very enslaved individuals that were brought to the Americas by the South Sea Company could be used as a threat against imperial power. The British hoped to use a common Spanish tactic, offering freedom to slaves that would both boost their own military power and damage the productive capacities of the enemy.⁸² By taking away local support for Spanish government, it was hoped, the British might absorb Spanish lands and subjects into their own growing empire, and with them the natural resources that attracted the British to the Americas for centuries.

Having reported his affection for the Darien scheme in his youth, Houstoun reiterated the possible benefits of a British settlement or wartime occupation of the Isthmus of Panama in his 1747 and 1753 memoirs.⁸³ Houstoun was not alone in his enthusiasm for reinvigorating the Darien project as the conflict with Spain grew. In November of 1739, Robert Knight wrote to Newcastle to propose a reattempted settlement of Darien, in order to obstruct the existing Spanish trade and to oversee the route from North to South America, with the help of the local Indians. In addition to controlling shipping and creating new markets for "woolen and other manufactures," they could secure access to rumored gold mines in the lands controlled by the native peoples.⁸⁴ Another letter-writer suggested that the company or its agents might "make a good settlement at Darien," from which they could access the South Seas and the trade to Asia beyond, opening up a long-sought British route to the Pacific. Though some, including the celebrated Vice-Admiral Edward Vernon, considered the isthmus to be too unhealthy a climate for Britons to survive long, others eyed the natural and mineral resources in the area jealously.⁸⁵

Several authors and letter-writers provided specific suggestions for the most strategic cities or regions that might be seized in a British attack. It would be unnecessary to take over the entire American empire at once, especially if trade was a major component of Britain's goals. One pamphleteer echoed pre-asiento suggestions to focus on the main ports of trade to Europe; "if we can settle ourselves at Buenos Ayres, the Spaniards will be under an absolute necessity to open a Trade with us."⁸⁶ Another British subject, David Campbell, suggested that Havana was a perfect place to seize, arguing that "the people in general here & over the whole Island, love & esteem the English above any other nation . . . they have a great opinion of our integrity, & honour, & regret our being hereticks." Here a disagreement among the British as to the basic nature of the Spanish arose. While some Britons rejected the Spanish entirely and blamed the animosity between the empires for violence against Britons, Campbell presented the Spanish subjects as an asset of the area, suggesting that their natural affection for the British would make conquest easy and pleasant. In addition, Cuba had "great numbers of slaves which perhaps with good management might be properly employed & directed in facilitating a conquest."⁸⁷ Leeward Islands governor John Hart argued for a British presence in Puerto Rico as early as 1729, with an eye to dislodging the pirates who moored there and taking advantage of the mines, "rich in gold," and fertile land wasted by the Spanish.⁸⁸ Seizing a geographically strategic West Indian island during the war would allow the British to expand their own power as well as deny the Spanish an important site for refueling and launching attacks on British holdings.⁸⁹ Captain Fayrer Hall suggested a seizure of Spanish Florida in 1731, though he acknowledged that the British would likely not be as successful at converting native groups to Christianity as the Spanish had been.⁹⁰ For many of these writers, the goal was to seize pieces of Spain's empire as a launch pad for trade and additional expansion, rather than to attempt to oust Spain from the Americas immediately and entirely.

Even at the close of the war, Britons were circulating reports and observations suggesting the most viable site for a takeover of Spanish holdings. One Briton, who was a prisoner of war for the final three years of the conflict, notified his countrymen that the island of Puerto Rico was particularly likely for British colonization. He explained the richness of the island and the reasons he had gleaned that it was not presently of a particularly high profile in the West Indies; "It might in the hands of the English or Dutch be rendered a paradise on earth but the present inhabitants are mere devils." The author assured Britons that the island was surprisingly healthy, considering its situation, and that

it could be greatly improved by a diligent application of British ingenuity. Seizing this part of the Spanish empire would not only enrich the British by increasing their holdings, but also by removing the island as a potential threat to British peace and growth, as “this town is a nest of pirates in time of peace, and an asylum for runaway negroes from our islands.”⁹¹ By possessing a site from which they might otherwise be attacked at sea or which might harbor the runaway slaves that so recently signed a treaty of peace at Jamaica, Britons could hope to continue their growth in the West Indies and protect imperial profits.

In a last effort to settle the conflict peacefully, the British and Spanish attempted to come to an agreement at the Convention of El Pardo in early 1739. The British demanded £95,000 as restitution for the ships and cargoes seized by overzealous *guardacostas*, but could not collect on this demand.⁹² The Spanish king issued a manifesto that year explaining why he refused to pay the stipulated amount and enumerating various complaints against the British crown. The Spanish cited lawbreaking by the South Sea Company, smuggling, religious damages, and the carrying away of Spanish subjects on British ships as reasons for anger against Britain.⁹³ King Philip V expressed dismay that, while he ostensibly immediately sent dispatches to his lands abroad calling for conformity to the stipulations of the treaty, the British king failed to do the same.⁹⁴ Unable to compel the cooperation of the British and concerned about the presence of British vessels near Gibraltar, Philip ordered reprisals against their ships in August.⁹⁵ Just as the British claimed the moral high ground in their own pamphlets, the Spanish insisted that they were the wronged party, and that while England’s main goal was a military defense of “the unjust usurpations of the Islands and Territories she has invaded, in breach of the Treaty of Utrecht, and to maintain herself in the clandestine Trade it practices, to the prejudice of the lawful Trade of the allies of Spain,” Spain “seeks no other thing than to defend its Honour against the Calumnies whereby she is attack’d.”⁹⁶

Tensions between the Spanish and British in the Americas had been rising for the better part of the decade, and with the failure of the Convention of El Pardo, little stood between the uneasy peace and outright war. Urged on by his country’s merchants and provoked by perceived insults springing from Spanish refusals to compensate his subjects for unlawful seizures, King George II declared war on the Spanish empire on October 19, 1739. In the formal declaration, he listed the “depredations” his subjects had suffered, complained of repeated breaches of long-standing treaties, and authorized British ships to take Spanish warships as prizes wherever they could. Both sides hoped the war would help to preserve their trade and possessions in the Americas.⁹⁷

Prosecuting the War: 1739–1748

The War of Jenkins's Ear was marked by early British victories, followed by a long series of defeats. By the time the war broke out, Britons were well aware of the best locations on the Spanish American shores to attack, based on their growing knowledge of Spain's empire.⁹⁸ Vernon's immensely popular capture of Portobello in November of 1739, which sparked celebrations throughout Great Britain, started the war off for Britons on an optimistic note.⁹⁹ Portobello's location on the Isthmus of Panama made it a particularly important prize geographically.¹⁰⁰ Vernon's apparently easy triumph over the local Spanish forces greatly bolstered Britain's hopes for success in the conflict.

Unfortunately for Great Britain, this first significant triumph over the Spanish was not followed by the quick capitulation of other Spanish port cities. A later attack against Cartagena met with effective Spanish resistance, and as more nations joined the war in the mid-1740s the possibilities for any sort of spectacular British success in the Americas waned, and along with it British fervor.¹⁰¹ While the British government pushed Vernon to seize and occupy Spanish lands, and sent him the troops to do so, he was ultimately unable to deliver.¹⁰² Commodore George Anson, given specific orders "to distress and annoy the King of Spain" with his Pacific-bound fleet and despite popular hopes for his project, ultimately failed to make much of a dent in the Spanish control of the area either.¹⁰³ At the same time, in the mid-1740s, the British encountered significant problems at home with what the merchants characterized in a letter as "the late most horrid and unnatural rebellion" of the Pretender.¹⁰⁴ Great Britain faced threats from all sides.

While the British developed a formidable naval force in the preceding century, officials found it a challenge to compel service from British subjects. A year into the war, Admiral Charles Wager wrote to Vernon to inform him "that though we are very strong by Sea in Ships, we have no Power to make our Seamen go on board of them . . . and I hope this Session the Parliament will think it necessary to compel them to come in."¹⁰⁵ Once they arrived in the West Indies, soldiers and sailors might abandon their posts for opportunities to serve their own interests smuggling or living in the colonies. It was difficult to keep soldiers from leaving if they chose to do so; it was even more difficult to keep them healthy enough to even consider leaving.¹⁰⁶



Figure 5. "Carthagene," from *Nouvelle relation, contenant les Voyages de Thomas Gage dans la Nouvelle Espagne*, published by Paul Marret, 1720. The failed attack on Cartagena during the War of Jenkins's Ear was a blow against British hopes for seizing Spanish American lands. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Both the Spanish and the British faced difficulties in conducting the war, in part because of the distance from Europe and in part because of the insalubrious nature of the tropical West Indian climate. While individual South Sea Company employees learned to deal with the heat and disease in Spanish American cities (or died quickly), shipping large numbers of often poorly provisioned soldiers to these areas was quite dangerous.¹⁰⁷ Throughout the West Indies, the armies and navies of both empires faced problems with the corrosive effects of the tropical waters, as well as provisioning their ships.¹⁰⁸

While the British held fears about the growing Spanish navy, their troubles in conducting the war were much more attributable to the environment of the West Indies. The siege of Cartagena, in particular, failed in large part because of the differential immunity between the Spanish soldiers, who had lived in the area for some time, and the British soldiers who, coming from the metropole, fell in large numbers to the yellow fever and dysentery spread by swarms of mosquitoes and tainted drinking water. After only little more than a month, the British commanders called off the siege because of the large numbers of soldiers they were losing. The horrors of the West Indies were, for British soldiers and sailors, much more a product of disease than of war: one calculation suggests that seventy-four percent of the 10,000 British soldiers in the West Indies during the first three years of the war died, overwhelmingly as the result of illness rather than combat.¹⁰⁹ Neither side found the war easy, and troops sent from Europe succumbed to the harsh disease environment of the Caribbean in large numbers throughout the war.

Neither Britons nor Spaniards could rely solely on their own troops if they hoped to be successful in the war. In times of war as in peace, identities and alliances in the West Indies blurred. In addition to employing liminal figures such as Irish sailors, as they had in other wars, both the British and Spanish turned to both native and African allies, groups that could not remain outside of the sphere of influence created by these Europeans in the new world. In this hostile environment, empires relied on multiple sources of military power, even sources that had once caused them significant trouble. At the same time, these groups had different and sometimes conflicting agendas, just as the various factions within the British and Spanish empires. As did Jamaica residents, British sailors, or Spanish American governors, Native Americans and Africans used the British and Spanish imperial projects to their own ends.

In Jamaica, letters from Governor Edward Trelawny to then Paymaster of the Forces Henry Pelham reveal the difficulties that the island faced in

defending itself and launching attacks against Spanish holdings in the area. In a 1741 letter, Trelawny expressed his relief and pride over “the good luck I have had to have the wild negroes brought to terms in my administration at a most critical time.”¹¹⁰ The end of the First Maroon War in 1739 had the double effect of removing a possible distraction for the armed forces of the island and increasing the island’s possible defenses, as it lessened the dangers of arming slaves to fight against the Spanish. Due to the continuing problems with what the Jamaican government saw as an underpopulation of Europeans on the island, this was a particularly attractive option for the colony.¹¹¹ Though the government in London attempted to support the island by sending troops, it was of little use; “the number of officers & men that have died is incredible,” Trelawny reported.¹¹² Arming slaves would mean a greater defense force for the island; at the same time, though, arms might allow enslaved groups to revolt and side with the Spanish against Jamaicans.

The fear that African slaves from the British Empire might desert to or work for the enemy was not unfounded, and was in fact an important part of the Spanish strategy. In 1742, the Spanish determined to attempt to oust the British from their new colony in Georgia. Though the Spanish had not settled the area themselves and had no plans to do so during the war, they did consider it to be rightfully theirs based on prior claims.¹¹³ Hoping to remove the British from the colony, the Spanish amassed forces off the coast. The plan called for both regular troops and a militia that included “whites, mulattoes and negroes.” Upon seizing the British American port, the governor of Cuba ordered, “negroes of all languages” were to be sent out “to convoke the slaves of the English in the plantations round about, and offer them, in the name of our King, liberty, if they will deliver themselves up of their own accord.”¹¹⁴ Slaves willing to ally with the Spanish would be given land in Florida for their own use, among the already significant population of free Africans who had been British slaves.¹¹⁵ Indeed, this extraimperial incentive for revolt was a motivation for the decision to ban slavery in the new Georgia colony, highlighting British fears of having African slaves in areas anywhere near the Spanish viceregal borders.¹¹⁶ As with the Maroon War in Jamaica and the rebellions in Cuba and elsewhere, the presence of the slaves, whose transport to the Americas was the impetus behind the cooperation between the British and Spanish, once again created problems for the empires. These enslaved actors, though unable to participate in the project of empire in ways similar to merchants, were nonetheless able to make use in their own ways of the empires’ ambitions in cases in which the Spanish or British turned to them

for assistance. Though the Spanish did not succeed in ousting the Georgia colonists, the potential for the involvement of current or former slaves in the interimperial conflict caused worry on both sides.

Among the British, Governor Trelawny also embraced the possible assistance of Indian soldiers, both before and during the war with Spain. Native soldiers had been recruited during the conflicts with the Maroon communities in Jamaica under Nicholas Lawes.¹¹⁷ As the war in the West Indies heated up, Trelawny encouraged the leveraging of the Miskito Indians against the Spanish troops on the Spanish Main, despite the difficulty of working with the group.¹¹⁸ He reported that intervention in the Miskito territories of what is now Nicaragua would benefit the British, as the local groups were inclined to ally with them, and could be a useful force if closely guided by European soldiers. Trade to the area would undoubtedly be profitable, he promised, as even the Spanish living in the area would prefer to trade with the British over their previous trading partners, the Dutch.¹¹⁹ If the Miskito Indians had not yet proven useful allies in the current military conflict, in Trelawny's estimation they certainly would soon. Native allies were key to both sides in the war; once again, a group formally outside the core of either empire became important to imperial success. Though the use of native allies such as the Miskito Indians did not ultimately win the war for the British, acting as informants for and allies with one or another European group could allow Native Americans to influence the outcome of individual campaigns and angle for a certain amount of power and protection for their own communities. Here again, individuals and interest groups were simultaneously being used to build empire and using the empire to their own advantages.

Most Europeans struggled through the war. Despite native assistance, the British had few successes after Vernon's early seizure of Portobello. This was not like the previous two brief ruptures; Jenkins's Ear transitioned into the War of the Austrian Succession, and raged on for nearly a decade. During the extended fighting, some Britons continued to trade to the Spanish coast, though at a significant danger to themselves. The opportunity for cooperative and friendly trade of the type engaged in by the South Sea Company declined, and finally vanished, as the war continued. With the loss of the company's power in the area, however, independent traders and Spanish smugglers once again found markets sorely in need of their goods. As the official imperial projects in the area faltered, individual Europeans found new possibilities for profit in the West Indies in ways that once again put the peace of empires in second place to individual interests.

Interruptions and Continuities of Trade

Individuals who lived in the West Indies felt the impact of the imperial conflict immediately. As the war developed and the nation rallied for anti-Spanish military action, subjects of both empires who had previously been traveling or trading, legally or illegally, in the opposing empire's territories suddenly faced possible military detention. Even before the official beginning of the war, Trelawny wrote to the duke of Newcastle to ask what was to be done with the Spanish subjects who had already been taken, given the expense the island was incurring in feeding them.¹²⁰ On both sides, subjects caught behind the lines of the opposing empire suddenly found themselves at the mercy of their new enemies.

Spanish subjects moving through British-held lands or traveling near their shores could easily be caught up in the conflict. In 1741, after the unsuccessful siege, the viceroy of New Granada, Don Sebastian de Eslava, wrote to Vernon begging his help in releasing four high-profile prisoners in Jamaica. These men, the Spanish viceroy explained, were civilians bound for Peru. They had no military position, but were simply passengers aboard a seized ship. Eslava suggested organizing an exchange for the British prisoners in Cuba immediately.¹²¹ The possibility of capture and detention loomed large on both sides of the imperial divide.

South Sea Company factors who were until then living peacefully in the Spanish port cities suddenly found themselves in a dangerous and inhospitable environment. In past conflicts, factors were sent to Jamaica for their own safety until the conclusion of hostilities, but in 1739 many faced a new reality. Some factors were refused passage out of the Spanish empire and held essentially as prisoners of war in their adopted cities until their freedom could be secured by British forces. Though those who had gotten out of the Spanish Americas before the war began might continue, as Houstoun did, to socialize and trade with the Spanish, the war made this much more logistically difficult, and made staying in the Spanish empire for any length of time a gamble with one's freedom.

From the beginning, the war caused immediate problems for the factors in Cartagena, where in late September a British ship headed by a Captain Stapylton came to give the factors notice of the impending break with Spain. The British ship anchored off shore, insisting it meant only to deliver its message, and Don Blas de Lezo, a Spanish admiral famous for his military skill

and extensive battle injuries, sent out a small crew to pilot the ship into harbor, thinking it was there to trade.¹²² In the confusion, Captain Stapylton ended up seizing the Spanish pilot boat and its crew. Because of this infraction, the local company factors reported, there was “an alarm here that the factory, company’s effects & our own were forthwith embargoed, & we confined prisoners to the city & we fear the same will be practice at Panama & Portobelo where we believe the effects are very considerable.” Among the factors, James Ord and John Gray wrote to Governor Trelawny begging him to return the Spanish boat and crew, in order to “protect us in this emergency.” Though it is impossible to say whether these men were exaggerating, or even bending the truth to appease the Spanish, as they were writing from captivity, their letter does contain some striking praise for Spanish admiral. Blas de Lezo, they wrote, was “the only person we could depend upon for the protection” and he “has given us so many instances of his good will that we could not doubt not in our publick but in our private capacity.”¹²³ It appears the Spanish admiral had extensive contact with the British factors in the years before the 1739 war, and that some of those relations were friendly. This did not, however, keep Blas de Lezo from holding them captive in the city until his men and ship were returned.

A similar situation unfolded at Portobello before Vernon took control of the city. On the vice-admiral’s insistence, the president of Panama sent him South Sea Company factor Francis Humphreys and the factory surgeon, a Dr. Wright, both of whom were imprisoned at the beginning of the war.¹²⁴ More than half a year after these agents were returned to their countrymen, Trelawny wrote to the governor of Santiago de Cuba, inquiring after the company’s factors there, as he had heard that “the servants to the Assiento Company are detained as prisoners of War in your city.”¹²⁵ Trelawny cited article 40 of the asiento treaty, which would require the release of the factors, but also appealed to the Spanish governor’s sense of humanity and decency. He explained that “compassion made me comply with the request of some unfortunate Spaniards belonging to Cuba who were taken immediately upon the rupture,” and that he allowed them to return to their island, “not doubting but you would think yourself obliged to have sent me all the subjects belonging to the king that might at that time have been within your jurisdiction.”¹²⁶ A trade of Spanish for British prisoners also occurred in the same year in order for the company to retrieve the factors living in the Veracruz factory.¹²⁷

Some South Sea Company employees took the opportunity of the war to

share their intimate knowledge of Spanish American territories with British military officials. One such man, a Captain Lee, came to Admiral Wager to offer his expertise on the Spanish lands, which he had amassed from his years as a South Sea Company factor in Guatemala, in his time as captain of ships sailing throughout the West Indies and the mainland North American colonies, and in the illegal logwood trade on the Spanish Main. Lee assured the admiral that the Spanish creoles and the local native groups around Guatemala would welcome a British presence, as they “are as much Enemies to the Governors and European Spaniards, as we are.”¹²⁸

Despite the dangers of capture and detention he faced when traveling to an empire with which his country was at war, Houstoun engaged in trade, both legal and illegal, with the Spanish throughout his decade-plus tenure in the empire. Immediately before the War of Jenkins’s Ear, he bought a ship that was to sail between Veracruz and Jamaica for the South Sea Company, hoping that the convention would allow at least a brief period of continued cooperation. As he reported, the court of directors chose him to be surgeon at that place, although the factory was seized at the start of the war, almost immediately after his arrival in the West Indies.¹²⁹ He returned to Jamaica from a voyage to England in May of 1739, but soon found himself in trouble with the factors who were to transport him to Veracruz. He reported to the court of directors that some mysterious associates of these men had insulted and assaulted him, attempting to destroy his reputation and keep him from his journey so another could take his place. Having the support of Merewether and Manning, the company’s senior agents in Jamaica, he accused the other factors of plotting to damage him as a part of their efforts to protect their own improper financial maneuvering.¹³⁰ The declaration of war soon rendered the question of Houstoun’s position in the Veracruz factory moot. He quickly lost the ship to the difficulties arising from the war and because of what he characterized as the unscrupulousness of the captain, who defected to the Spanish. (Houstoun explains that “he was an Irishman, which to my Sorrow I knew when too late.”¹³¹) This did not discourage Houstoun from his dreams of profit. Following his early disappointment in 1739, he reports, “I turned my Thoughts intirely to try if any thing could be done in private Trade upon the Spanish Coast, where I was perfectly well-acquainted.”¹³² The war kept Houstoun from living among his Spanish American friends and acquaintances, but did not keep him from interacting with the Spanish and profiting from his willingness to act against the trade policies of the British Empire.

Houstoun took advantage of his experiences with the South Sea Company to retain his Spanish contacts. He continued his trading efforts in the Caribbean, including to the major fair at Portobello. In fact, Houstoun noted that during Vernon's assault on Portobello, his general trade in the area flourished.¹³³ As war drove the empires apart, contraband grew between them, as did the dangers of this trade. He purchased two vessels' worth of cargo, and accompanied them to the Spanish American coast himself. He explained that these sloops traveled in small groups of five or six along with a man-of-war for protection. Houstoun did profit from this trade, but he found it much less lucrative than it was before the war. He complained that prices were reduced to about a third of what they had been earlier, and were driven down by the large commission drawn by the captain of the man-of-war; "the cunning Spaniard all this while flips no opportunity to improve that strife to his own Advantage."¹³⁴ Houstoun's affection did not extend to all Spanish subjects, as this statement makes clear. He remained pragmatic, willing nonetheless to engage in trade with these individuals in the interest of his own purse.

These were not short or superficial contacts with Spanish subjects. Houstoun developed close relationships with many in Cartagena and throughout the Spanish American coast, and these continued after the outbreak of war. Given the dangers of the trade, Houstoun reported, Spanish merchants would not go out to engage in contraband trade themselves, but send an agent, who would often deliver his master's opinions along with his money. As Vernon laid siege to the empire's major ports, Houstoun spoke to his Spanish correspondents about the "sentiments" of the Spanish merchants. They shared Houstoun's distress at the war, "lamenting the Destruction of Commerce, which they were very sensible must end in the intire Ruin of their Country."¹³⁵ The battles that erupted around the Caribbean meant that Houstoun sometimes came into contact again with Spanish American officials; as Vernon moved through Cuba, a magistrate of Santiago de Cuba met with Houstoun on one of his trading ships, and informed him that the city would be wholly unable to defend itself. While his inclusion of this anecdote might be less a recounting of strict fact and more a subtle encouragement to attempt to retake the area, his *Memoirs* make very clear Houstoun's disdain for Vernon when the admiral failed to seize Cuba.¹³⁶

Frustration pervaded the war years for the Spanish Americans as well. Houstoun noted that local Spanish subjects "were at a very great Expence, and run much risk in buying goods in that clandestine, contraband way." If

the ships carrying illegally traded goods were detected at sea, they could be seized by the Spanish government. On land, the contraband was no safer; “for they had no less than twelve different guards to pass from Porto-bello to Panama, and every one must be paid in passing; and perhaps, after they had passed and paid eleven, the twelfth seizes upon all, or makes them pay through the Nose for it.”¹³⁷ Although Houstoun gives no account of the cargoes he shipped to the Spanish Americas during the war, it is clear that goods, likely manufactures, coming from the British Empire were highly coveted among the Spanish subjects in the Caribbean and inland. One historian’s study of contraband during the *asiento* trade lists “flour, pitch, tar, beef, pork, mercury, brass, iron ware of several kinds, woolens, cottons, canvas, mules’ shoes, and nails” as popular goods on Spanish America’s black market. It is likely that Houstoun traded these varied goods, as well as slaves, on his own account during the long war, though he would never be able to return to the area with the kind of semipermanence of the *asiento* period.¹³⁸

As in any war, those caught behind enemy lines, or in enemy cities, faced hardship among those with whom they had previously been in business relationships, and even friendships. Those not redeemed during the war could hope that the end of hostilities would mean a return to their country, but not to the individual prosperity (or potential for prosperity) they had during the *asiento*. Houstoun and his fellow British traders lamented the end of the *asiento*, and with it the possibility for success in Spanish lands. As the true scope of the South Sea Company’s failure became clear, the options for trade to Spanish America would never again reach the heights enjoyed during the course of the treaty.

Ultimately, cooperation collapsed under the weight of religious and other tensions, conflict over contraband trade and piracy, and internal disruptions within each empire related to the difficulties of the slave trade, bringing war to the West Indies. With this, the opportunity for sustained and officially sanctioned interpersonal Anglo-Spanish interaction in the Americas came to an effective end, even though some, less concerned with imperial policy than with practicalities, were able to readjust their expectations and continue to reap some profit throughout the war. The chance for these nations to pursue mutual profit, to form friendly relationships, and to angle for geographic control of portions of one another’s empires in close proximity would not be re-created at such a scale before the disintegration of these empires in the later part of the century. The end of the British

asiento period came not after a long, profitable cooperation between the company and the Spanish, as intended. Rather, it was the result of significant breakdowns in the interimperial alliance that could not be counteracted sufficiently by the cooperation that still persisted between individual members of each empire. The closeness had, in fact, been one of the factors driving the breakdown of the peace.

EPILOGUE

Beyond the Asiento

The asiento trade laid bare some of the competing interests that complicated the project of British and Spanish settlement, commerce, and imperial expansion in the Americas. The first half of the eighteenth century marked a period of experimentation in the Americas, an attempt by multiple parties, including the British and Spanish governments, various local governments in the Americas, individual agents of groups like the South Sea Company and Royal African Company, independent traders, and settlers in the Americas, among others, to create a system that best served their own aims, often in ways that conflicted with the needs of others. The slave trade and the considerable contraband trade that accompanied it connected the projects of the Spanish and British empires, creating a system in which some Britons hoped for the takeover of Spanish lands, but many profited from the existence of a large and import-hungry Spanish empire, even as the Spanish benefited from a combination of legal and illegal trade from Britons. After the War of Jenkins's Ear, the opportunities that the asiento created for these various groups to seek power and fortune in the Americas shifted, moving away from the fluidity of the earlier period to greater attempts at control by imperial powers. As the Jamaica merchants experienced at the beginning of the South Sea Company's asiento, more attempts at imperial control limited the opportunities of people who had exploited previous iterations of empire for their own interests. Increased success, as measured by empires, led to restriction for those who had for many years taken advantage of the spaces for trade that empires created in their early state.

By 1748 the long war reached its conclusion. Throughout the nine years of hostilities, the Anglo-Spanish conflict intersected with larger-scale conflicts in Europe, and by the last years of the ensuing War of the Austrian Succession, France, Prussia, Austria, and Holland joined the fray. The European

powers brought a definitive end to the conflict in the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle without actually changing the ownership of any American lands.¹ Britain and Spain settled their financial matters in a separate treaty, enacted two years later, in 1750. In the Treaty of Madrid the empires cut their losses, ended the asiento contract, and reestablished the 1667 status quo.² As compensation for losing the exclusive rights to the slave trade to their American colonies, Spain agreed to pay the South Sea Company one hundred thousand pounds sterling.³ The South Sea Company ultimately failed to secure the promised profits from their limited direct trade to the Spanish Americas, at least on an official level; instead of continuing with the asiento treaty, British merchants refocused on the previous trade through Old Spain, which could still be legally profitable.⁴

The lure of profit proved powerful enough to easily overcome any considerations of national loyalty for some British and Spanish subjects in the short term. Indeed, during the war British ships continued to visit Spanish ports (even those under attack, such as St. Augustine) in order to supply the inhabitants with European goods.⁵ Governor Trelawny noted that contraband trade actually significantly increased in some areas during the war, because of a combination of the destruction of the *guardacostas* and the fact that Spanish American settlements suffered from a lack of supplies that were not coming from Spain with their usual frequency.⁶ Though the official trade ended for a time, personal contacts between Britons and Spanish subjects and the attraction of the large profits possible in contraband trade meant that while extralegal trading might be more risky, not all connections between members of these empires were severed.

The 1750 treaty definitively ended the asiento trade between the British and Spanish, but it did not mean the disbanding of the South Sea Company. The company continued to hold the monopoly they had been granted until the nineteenth century, both on trade to the Spanish Americas and to the whale fishery in parts of the Pacific.⁷ Some individual and imperial British interests in economically productive contact with the Spanish continued through the mid- and late eighteenth centuries, despite the problems both nations were encountering in controlling their sprawling American empires.

Some South Sea Company employees lived in the West Indies throughout the whole war, hoping to continue the trade upon resuming peace. Edward Manning, who lived at Jamaica for many years before the war as a factor for the company, contracted during the war to supply slaves on a smaller scale to the Havana Company. He wrote to the South Sea Company, enthusiastic

about the profit that could be had because of the robust market for enslaved laborers in Havana, Portobello, and Cartagena. Due to the war, the number of slaves moving into these areas was lower than the market's demand, and Manning observed that in Cuba, since the end of the Havana Company's contract, those seeking slaves were "daily wishing for the reestablishment of the *asiento*."⁸ Though he was disappointed by the 1750 treaty, his presence in the West Indies through nine years of war makes it clear that trade was still very much possible for former company employees who continued relationships with local Spanish traders.

The end of the *asiento* trade came amid mixed expectations and elicited a variety of responses from the British public. Some groups still felt deeply damaged by the monopoly on the Spanish trade, while others championed the company. Arguments about the desirability of the *asiento* trade before the 1748 and 1750 treaties demonstrated the sharp divisions among Britons as to the advisability both of pursuing Spanish trade and of trying to incorporate Spanish American lands. Some wanted it continued; others questioned the wisdom of having entered into the treaty in the first place.

As the British Empire had tried to organize a trade that would benefit the government and a certain group of merchants, others who profited from a less structured imperial system suffered. One anonymous 1739 pamphlet focused on the failures of the company and the preferability of the pre-*asiento* private trade. It claimed, as had pamphlets in 1713, that the latter was more profitable by far, and strong enough to avoid problems with *guardacostas*: "the Private Traders were in no wise subject to the King of Spain's seizures to lessen their profits."⁹ The pamphlet observed that the company "have been severe Sufferers by" their monopoly on the slave trade to the Spanish Americas, as "they have yearly been deficient some Thousands in the Number of Negroes which by the Contract they were oblig'd to furnish the Spaniards withal."¹⁰ If the company could not fulfill the needs of the Spanish Americas for goods and enslaved labor, this suggested, it would only be fair for private traders to take over again. Another pamphleteer complained in 1744 that unscrupulous factors could never be as diligent and profitable in their work as private traders, because the employees of the South Sea Company "may have an eye to their own or Friends Interest" rather than that of the company or the nation.¹¹ Indeed, it appears that the company's detractors uncovered multiple abuses and errors committed by the court of directors, including failures of communication and payments to Spain, smuggling, falsifying the weight of ships, and supporting unscrupulous factors.¹² Despite the initial hopes for

a South Sea Company that would support the growth of the British Empire, at the end of the trade it became clear to many that some directors and factors were all too happy to act against the public interests.

A few Britons felt sure of their ability to succeed in the West Indies trade, regardless of the eventual status of the asiento contract, which was in any case scheduled to end during the War of Jenkins's Ear. The failure of the asiento for the South Sea Company did not stymie the enthusiasm some still had for the personal and public opportunities of empire.¹³ Even during the war, British merchant John Campbell assured his countrymen that they would triumph over the Spanish, who had by their own poor decisions driven their lands and trade to a low position. Campbell bemoaned the use of *guardacostas* and characterized the Spanish empire as poorly managed and consequently underproducing: "with the richest Territories the Spanish Monarch is one of the poorest, as well as proudest Princes in Christendom."¹⁴ Trade would continue, Campbell was sure, because Spain was and always had been unable to meet its own need for enslaved laborers. Some country would necessarily import African slaves, as "the Inhabitants of Peru never could be without Slaves."¹⁵ Given their long history of supplying labor and merchandise to the area, Britons were well-positioned to continue the trade, as far as Campbell was concerned.

Other Britons defended the South Sea Company's asiento trade for its profitability and for the opportunities it gave Britain for a direct trade with the Spanish Americas, unmediated by the merchants and tax officials at Cádiz. James Houstoun rebutted the slanders of detractors and blamed the failures of the trade on the misdeeds of the Spanish. From its inception, the British-held asiento contract was a stroke of genius, Houstoun wrote. Indeed, "if rightly executed, [it] would have fairly laid open all the Ports of the Spanish West Indies to the British Trade, without giving Umbrage, or the least Offence to any Nation," avoiding the international grudge that establishing a direct and unlimited trade between the nations would have created.¹⁶ The South Sea Company, Houstoun argued, benefited the country greatly, bringing in more money by far than had private trade alone. The real problem, as he presented it, was the mismanagement of the asiento by the court of directors and some few unscrupulous factors abroad.¹⁷ With proper leadership, the South Sea Company would be able to continue its original mission, which was to succeed as near as possible in conducting a free trade to the Spanish Americas without involving Spanish merchants or taxes, to the general profit of the British nation. Other Britons feared the decline in trade if the loss of

the *asiento* were to be permanent. A letter from Havana warned British prime minister Henry Pelham that Cádiz merchants were angling to win the contract for themselves. If they were successful, “the English Merchants must lose the many advantages they have reaped by this commerce” and “our trade to Africa will be reduced to the supply of our own collonys with Negroes + in all probability this will be done very scantily,” hurting both the profit from trade to the Spanish colonies and the British colonies themselves.¹⁸

Some Spanish subjects also supported the continuation of the *asiento* trade, given the mutual profit available to some involved in it. In 1748, Don Manuel de Cosuela and his brother wrote to the governors of the South Sea Company to ask to be included in the trade, should it be resumed. Their earlier proposals had been interrupted by war, but Cosuela hoped that if a permission ship was to be sent in 1749 that it might be entrusted entirely to him. This would be less expensive than reestablishing a factory to deal with the merchandise, and the brothers argued that they were uniquely qualified to dispose of the goods for the company, as “from the knowledge we have of this Country, and the inhabitants who reside here, we shall be able to give the proper esteem to the cargo.” As proof of their knowledge of the Spanish American market, they included detailed instructions on which goods would sell well, going so far as to warn that while dark colored cloth would sell best, “grave few reds” should be sent.¹⁹ While the 1750 treaty made the fulfillment of the Cosuela brothers’ hopes impossible, it is clear that individual Spanish subjects were still willing to conduct a trade with the British, even considering the long war they suffered. Despite the support of some groups of people on both sides for the continuation of the *asiento* contract, the prospects for this kind of trade came to an end with the Treaty of Madrid.

The treaty effectively ended the opportunity for the sustained, sanctioned interaction that the factors of the South Sea Company enjoyed during the *asiento* period. Regardless of the hopes they maintained during the war, no longer could British subjects expect to be able to spend years at a time in the major ports of the Spanish empire without facing significant problems with local officials. This put new limitations both on opportunities for individual trade and on the nation’s ability to access Spanish American markets and to collect information about Spanish lands. However, the conclusion of the official trade in no way meant the end of *all* Anglo-Spanish trade, and the accompanying contact, in the Americas. As they had during the official periods of peace and cooperation, despite legal limitations against private trade in the

Spanish Americas, contraband traders continued to exploit the extensive markets in the area during and after the nine-year war between the crowns. In part, Britain's willingness to continue some trade with Spain officially, and to turn a blind eye to unofficial trade, came from the gains they perceived for the country; Spain continued to offer a market from which specie could be extracted.²⁰ Diplomatic considerations, economic motives, and military worries influenced the trajectory of Anglo-Spanish relations, first tending toward friendly interaction and then toward renewed hostilities as global war broke out and the American empires of both nations began to crumble. On the ground in the Americas, those independent traders who operated between the empires in times of war and peace continued to carry goods, though conditions in the West Indies made this more difficult at some times than others.

The period from the 1750 treaty to the onset of the Seven Years' War has been dubbed by several historians as the "Seven Years' Peace." The chief Spanish ministers during that period, José de Carvajal y Lancáster and Richard Wall, were particularly sympathetic toward Great Britain, hoping for alliance with the country.²¹ It was during this period of peace that Houstoun published his final book, reiterating a good deal of the information on his time in the company that he included in his *Memoirs* (1747). Houstoun's *Works* (1753) demonstrated that Spain and relations therewith remained relevant for British readers and suggested what might be possible once again if friendly relations on the level of the asiento treaty resumed. For their part, British ministers hoped to ally with the Spanish as tensions mounted with France.²² Europe's multiple upheavals and wars would only get more traumatic with the revolutions of the late eighteenth century. In this context, strategic alliances appeared particularly important, and the outlook for Anglo-Spanish cooperation seemed promising.

While the empires turned once again to peace, throughout the 1740s and 1750s the Spanish had become more adept at supplying their own empire with the goods they needed to maintain settlements. While the asiento contract was in effect, and for several decades before, the Spanish sent galleons to the colonies only sporadically; sometimes years could pass without landings of goods at terra firma. After the War of Jenkins's Ear, the reforms undertaken by the Bourbon monarchs led to a much more frequent transit of ships between Cádiz and the Americas, making reliance on foreign trade, legal or illegal, less necessary for colonial governors and merchants.²³ With these

changes, direct trade in slaves and merchandise between the British and Spanish in the Americas was replaced, at least in part, by Spanish shipping, making British merchants' long-term presence in the empire less necessary.

The end of the *asiento* and challenges to trade did not remove all British subjects from Spanish territories. A significant number of them also continued to live in lands officially claimed by the Spanish empire along what was called the Mosquito Coast in Honduras. For nearly two centuries, Britons were involved in the illegal trade in dyewoods and other natural resources from this heavily wooded coast, and the native populations appear to have been receptive to their presence.²⁴ These men logged the rich Central American woods of areas such as Honduras and Campeche, shipping the deep red dyewood back to Europe to supply the cloth manufacturers. The official Spanish position had long been that foreigners were not permitted to settle in any of the king's dominions, but in 1754 Ferdinand VI sent orders that the viceroy of New Spain and his governors should be instructed to "immediately desist" from destroying the British settlements, preferring to address the issue through diplomatic channels rather than direct violence.²⁵ In the decades after the War of Jenkins's Ear, the Spanish complained heartily about the estimated two thousand British subjects living in the area and exporting dyewood.²⁶ This trade produced significant profits for merchants in the British Empire, who did not have to buy from the Spanish because of the extensive production of the British interlopers.²⁷ Despite Spanish complaints, many Britons asserted the importance of these settlements to the empire and their right to maintain them because the Spanish had not taken advantage of the site themselves: "had not the subjects of England settled themselves in the bays of Campeachy and Honduras, they would in all probability have been uninhabited to this time," one claimed.²⁸ Though the degree of interaction that these woodcutters had with the Spanish subjects living along the coast is unclear, the persistent presence of Britons in lands claimed by the Spanish reveals a continued interest in exploiting or completely seizing Spanish territories.

The nations did not maintain their peace for long. Contraband trade slowed little during the postwar period, and illegal commerce and the related seizure of ships continued to cause problems as the empires clashed over trade and control in the West Indies.²⁹ By the second half of the 1750s war again enveloped the major European empires, and opportunities for legal trade quickly disappeared. The Seven Years' War disrupted legal commerce in Europe and the Americas, though contraband merchandise continued to

flow among all the empires involved, both in the West Indies and in North America.³⁰ The illegal trade, like that sanctioned by the government, proceeded unevenly. Despite the official bans on supplying goods to the enemy, in the early years of the new war contraband was quite lucrative, especially for those trading from Jamaica. The independent traders once again found themselves with willing and hungry markets in Spanish America. From the perspective of the empire, the success enjoyed by these British individuals was actually damaging to broader interests. By 1759, the British government's crackdown all but ended this illicit commerce with the Spanish.³¹

A different sort of wartime mixing and contact between the empires arrived with the British occupation of Havana in 1762.³² A major victory for the British in the Seven Years' War, the capture of Havana meant both a blow to the Spanish empire and a different set of opportunities for British merchants. While the British flag flew in Havana, trade flowed into Cuba from the British Empire once again, though not in the way it had during the *asiento* period. In less than one year, they imported thousands of slaves into the island.³³ During this brief period many British ships also managed to travel to other Spanish American ports, stretching the rules of the Spanish in order to transport trade goods to the manufactures-starved Spanish subjects in the vice-royalties.³⁴ Subjects of the British and Spanish Empires could expect to come into periodic contact with one another to engage in trade or combat, but sustained cooperation on an imperial level of the sort aspired to during the British *asiento* period was unlikely.

The Seven Years' War came to an end not long after the occupation of Havana, bringing a temporary conclusion to overt aggression between the British and Spanish. Unlike in the preceding major European war, the peace led to a significant shuffling of territories among the powers, with Britain taking West Florida and Spain gaining the massive Louisiana territory from the French. While the empires remained officially at odds with one another, and relations within Europe continued to be uneasy, the intense cultural and international mixing that characterized the West Indies during the early eighteenth century occurred in new locations in the period after the war. Individual imperial subjects took it upon themselves to create new areas of cultural mixing that increased their profits but disregarded the policies of London and Madrid. Under Spanish rule, the Louisiana territory attracted large British and French populations.³⁵ This was not the sort of officially sanctioned interaction that the South Sea Company fostered in the Spanish American ports, but did exemplify the primacy of economic interests over

official imperial loyalties for those French and British subjects who moved into territories belonging to the Spanish empire, and the Spanish subjects who accommodated them.

The peace brought no official additional trading rights for the British, though the contraband trade and the indirect trade allowed by the 1667 treaty (and resanctioned by the treaties signed after the War of the Austrian Succession) meant that profits were still available to those independent merchants who sought them.³⁶ In a 1762 reprint of a 1712 pamphlet, British subject Robert Allen, who had been part of the Darien expedition and later lived in the Spanish Americas, noted that illicit trade flourished for years in the Indies despite official sanctions against it. Before the *asiento* treaty, he observed, “interest, the true loadstone of all merchants, brought the Spaniards in those parts, to come and trade with our vessels in the private creeks; where our vessels commonly lay to trade with them.”³⁷ His nearly ten-year residence in Panama and Quito gave him ample opportunity to observe this trade. There was little to suggest that this behavior would not continue in the postwar period, as Spanish need for European goods had in no way abated and British thirst for gold and silver showed no signs of declining.³⁸

By 1765, the British were called upon once again to indirectly provide slaves to the Spanish Americas. The *Compañía Gaditana de Negros*, a Cádiz-based company that held the new monopoly on the Spanish American slave trade, turned to slave traders in the British Caribbean to provide the laborers needed in the empire as the Portuguese and French had in previous contracts. This company imported slaves, and with them flour, ostensibly as provisions rather than for sale. In reality, this trade provided the Spanish Americas with a huge amount of British North American flour, which was difficult to obtain by other means. This trade met with numerous problems, not least because of the repeated complaints about the company smuggling excess flour, which was needed far more than slaves in places like Cuba that had recently experienced poor harvests.³⁹

The renewal of legal trade brought with it some of the same problems that vexed the South Sea Company's *asiento*. In 1765 British accountant John Wright noted the dangers that attended the trade given the continuing activity of the *guardacostas*. The murky legality of the scope of the trade actually being carried out, and the participation of smugglers from both empires, is suggested in Wright's warning that “in trading with the Spaniards, whether in their own Ports in the West Indies, or in their Creeks and Bays, or with such as come with money to buy Goods at Jamaica, Pensacola and Mobile in West

Florida, or at any other Port or Settlement belonging to the English in America," it was important to determine in advance whether the cost of goods was to be paid in full dollars, or in some currency of lesser worth.⁴⁰ Even when certain types of trade were officially sanctioned, different expectations and standards in each empire might create confusion for those moving between them, a continuing source of strain.

The British and Spanish found the possibility of profit and convenience valuable enough to set aside some of their differences on an imperial level and conduct a limited legal trade between Jamaica and the Spanish colonies. A Spanish act in 1765 and the British Free Port Act of 1766 allowed for certain goods to come into the Spanish Americas, and for the British to exchange European wares for bullion and other merchandise through Jamaica.⁴¹ Once again, individuals living in the British and Spanish empires might have some limited contact with one another as trading partners, but without the extended and organized residence of British factors in Spanish American ports. In 1773 the Spanish definitively turned to Jamaica for enslaved Africans once again.⁴² The terms of the trade would be different, without British factors resident in the Spanish colonies, but this peaceful commerce between empires was nonetheless encouraging to merchants who hoped for continued contact with the other empire. Britain remained very active in the slave trade to the Americas until the success of abolitionists in ending their Atlantic slave trade in 1808, and controlling at least part of the importation of enslaved laborers into Spanish colonies would remain an attractive possibility until the end.⁴³

Through the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, groups of Britons conducted trade with Spain, though the legality of this trade varied depending on imperial policy and times of war and peace. The South Sea Company offered a brief opportunity for a trade that was legal in both empires, and the British hoped that it might offer an entryway into an even larger trade. By connecting this company trade to a government monopoly, the *asiento* trade displaced the merchants from Jamaica and elsewhere in the British Empire who had previously supplied Spanish markets, though often contrary to Spanish law. Legalizing and regularizing the trade between the empires had allowed long-term residence in Spanish America for British subjects, a situation that would not be replicated in later years. While the decline of the company's trade opened opportunities for other Britons to supply Spanish vicerealties, the possibility of using a government monopoly trade to encroach on the Spanish empire closed.

The Seven Years' War and the American Revolution marked a definitive

conclusion to both Anglo-Spanish cooperation as it existed in the early eighteenth century and the “Seven Years’ Peace” and an end to realistic British aspirations regarding the control of large parts of the Americas. Despite this, however, the South Sea Company continued to profit from its technical rights to the Spanish American trade even a half-century and more after its main purpose had come to an end. As the British attempted to reestablish trade with the Spanish viceroyalties, even after the loss of many of their American colonies, the government continued to require merchants who wished to trade legally to South America and other areas covered by the company’s monopoly to cease their activity or to financially compensate the court of directors.⁴⁴

Those who acted as factors for the South Sea Company had diverse experiences of the post-asiento period. Houstoun remained in the West Indies as a sometimes-contraband merchant; Burnet lived in Madrid as a royal physician. Both found ways to make the close contact with Spanish American merchants and subjects benefit them personally. While many of their actions supported the development and interests of the British Empire, both engaged in self-interested projects that were made possible by the British Empire and doing damage to it. The fates of many more company agents are not preserved in the records, though their experiences likely drew in similar ways on their lives in the Spanish Americas. Living in the Spanish empire and interacting with Spanish subjects gave these men a set of skills and contacts that would make them valuable after the end of the trade, though the break with the Spanish created a frustrating distance from the friends and business contacts they made during their years as factors.

By the late eighteenth century, problems within the European territories in the New World made it clear that the era of major American empires was coming to an end. As debates within the British Empire about the morality and desirability of slavery heated up in the years before the American Revolution, the selling of slaves began to seem less attractive to many of those outside the trade.⁴⁵ When the trade came to an official end for the British in 1808, slavery, and likely some clandestine trade in slaves to Latin America, continued in the West Indies, but the widespread asiento trade of the early eighteenth century was a success the British could not hope to replicate or reinstate.

From the end of the asiento period with the War of Jenkins’s Ear to the collapse of the British American empire in the 1770s, the structure of the British Empire in the Americas shifted dramatically, and the opportunities

for the British and Spanish to have sustained legal contact in an area in which the rules and borders were still in flux came to an end. Trade, legal and illegal, would be reestablished periodically between the British and Spanish empires, but the intense prolonged interaction between subjects of each empire occurring in an area as contested and economically important as the Americas was no longer possible. The increase in imperial control enacted by the British and Spanish in the second half of the eighteenth century shifted the opportunities of empire away from those who succumbed to the temptations of trade during earlier iterations of empire.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGI	Archivo General de Indias, Seville
AGN	Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City
AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid
BL	British Library, London
CL	Clements Library, University of Michigan
JCBL	John Carter Brown Library, Brown University
NAJ	National Archive of Jamaica, Spanish Town
NLJ	National Library of Jamaica, Kingston
TNA	National Archives [United Kingdom], Kew

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NOTES

Prologue. Before the Asiento

1. Wafer produced little documentation of his own life outside his *New Voyage*. No images of him exist from his lifetime. L. E. Elliott Joyce, Introduction to *A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America*, by Lionel Wafer (Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1933), xii. For more on Wafer and his contemporary William Dampier, see also Philip Edwards, *The Story of the Voyage: Sea-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 17–43.

2. Alison Games notes this valuing of practicalities over ideology in Games, *Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 83.

3. The push for looking at the interrelated character of the British and Spanish empires comes particularly from Eliga Gould, “Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery,” *American Historical Review* 112 (June 2007): 764–86. Shannon Lee Dawdy has identified a similar self-destructiveness in the French empire in Louisiana in Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

4. Travel to the Spanish empire posed significant danger to English subjects, from both civil and religious officials. While Englishmen had been traveling in very limited numbers to the Spanish Americas as contraband merchants, adventurers, and pirates throughout the sixteenth century, in defiance of the restrictive Spanish trade laws, they faced a very real threat of Inquisitorial prosecution. On early English encounters with the Spanish American Inquisition, see Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 276; Henry Charles Lea, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 414; Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 462–63; James A. Williamson, *A Short History of British Expansion* (London: Macmillan, 1922), 108; D.M. Loades, *England’s Maritime Empire: Seapower, Commerce, and Policy, 1490–1690* (New York: Longman, 2000), 88–91; John Hampden, *Francis Drake: Privateer* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1972), 26–27. The English claimed the right to sail in Spanish American waters despite Spain’s papal claim to the right to

exclude others from the region. David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 107.

5. London merchants trading to Old Spain suggested in a petition to King James I that they could provide “good intelligence” about the Spanish if their trade was supported by the crown. The English threat was borne out during the Armada War, when many merchants to Spain turned privateers. A. J. Loomie, “Religion and Elizabethan Commerce with Spain,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 50 (April 1964): 45. Jason Eldred, “‘The Just Will Pay for the Sinners’: English Merchants, the Trade with Spain, and Elizabethan Foreign Policy, 1563–1585,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 10 (Spring/Summer 2010): 10.

6. Since the sixteenth century, when Walter Raleigh sailed to Guyana for England and Richard Hakluyt wrote in praise of the country’s efforts toward empire, explorers, buccaneers, and promoters had looked for potential sources of profit in seizing goods, land, or both from the Spanish. This move toward an expansion in the power of England’s nascent empire in the Americas existed alongside a trade to the ports of Old Spain conducted by generations of English merchants. See Walter Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*, ed. Neil L. Whitehead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Richard Hakluyt, “Discourse of Western Planting,” *The Original Writings & Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts*, ed. E. G. R. Taylor, 2 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1935); Jean Olivia McLachlan, *Trade and Peace with Old Spain, 1667–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940).

7. The English seized Jamaica as part of a much larger planned expansion in the Caribbean. Nuala Zahedieh, “The Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655–1692,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (October 1986), 570–71; Carl Bridenbaugh and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624–1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 195–229; Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in the Age of Revolution, 1640–1661* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 157–212.

8. Cornelius Burroughs, *Rich Newes from Jamaica: of Great Spoyl made by the English upon the Enemy, both by Land & Sea. Being the Substance of a Letter from Cornelius Burroughs, Steward Generall, Dated from Point-Cagway* (London: M. Simmons, 1659), 3.

9. Clinton V. Black, *History of Jamaica*, 3rd ed. (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1968), 61. Carla Gardina Pestana has challenged traditional periodizations, arguing that piracy thrived in the Caribbean as a result of English decisions, but was not initially directly supported from Jamaica. Pestana, “Early English Jamaica Without Pirates,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 71, 3 (July 2014): 321–60. Whether or not they were initially recruited for their buccaneering skills by Jamaica’s governors, many who turned to piracy did sail from the island.

10. Wafer’s *A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America* (1699) and his Secret Report significantly downplay the illegality of some of his travels, focusing instead on describing the flora, fauna, native inhabitants, and military preparedness of the

Spanish American lands. On this focus on ethnography and biology among pirates who became authors, see Anna Neill, “Buccaneer Ethnography: Nature, Culture, and Nation in the Journals of William Dampier,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, 2 (Winter 2000): 165–80.

11. Lionel Wafer, *A New Voyage & Description of the Isthmus of America by Lionel Wafer, Surgeon on Buccaneers Expeditions in Darien, the West Indies, and the Pacific from 1680 to 1688. With Wafer's Secret Report (1698) and Davis' Expedition to the Gold Mines (1704)*, ed. L. E. Elliott Joyce (Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1934), xii.

12. Wafer, *New Voyage*, xv–xvii.

13. Wafer, *New Voyage*, 4.

14. Wafer, *New Voyage*, 19–27. Integration into a foreign community in the Americas to the point of losing one's identity was a recurring theme in the travels of Englishmen in the Americas. In the mid-seventeenth century, Thomas Gage had traveled in the Spanish Americas as a Dominican friar before returning to his English roots and converting to Protestantism. His 1648 account of his experiences noted that only by changing his clothing and language was he “now changed from an American into the fashions of an Englishman.” Gage's account goes on to provide valuable information about the trade, ports, and wealth of Spain's empire to his readopted English countrymen. On Gage, see E. Denison Ross and Eileen Power, eds., *Thomas Gage: The English-American, A New Survey of the West Indies, 1648*, Broadway Travellers Series (London: Routledge, 1928), x, 365, 381–82.

15. Wafer, *New Voyage*, 126.

16. While this information does not appear in Wafer's book, it has been reconstructed in great detail by L. E. Elliott Joyce in his introduction to *A New Voyage and Description*, xlii–xlvi.

17. William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World*, vol. 1, 7th ed. (London: James and John Knapton, 1729), 162; Glyndwr Williams, “‘The Inexhaustible Fountain of Gold’: English Projects and Ventures in the South Seas, 1670–1750,” in *Perspectives of Empire*, ed. John E. Flint and Glyndwr Williams (London: Longman, 1973), 32. Williams notes that Dampier and other explorers did not always return with full and accurate information, but did stir interest in attractive and “vulnerable” Spanish lands.

18. William Dampier, *A Collection of Voyages*, vol. 4 (London: James and John Knapton, 1729), 97.

19. Dampier, *Collection of Voyages*, vol. 2, 19.

20. Wafer, *New Voyage*, 134.

21. Wafer, *New Voyage*, 140, 145.

22. Wafer, *New Voyage*, lxix. Indeed, Wafer wrote to the duke of Leeds in 1689 or 1690 to suggest attacking Spanish holdings on the Isthmus of Panama and in the Caribbean. Glyndwr Williams, *The Great South Sea: English Voyages and Encounters 1570–1750* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 134.

23. On the variety of options as debated in political circles, see Steve Pincus, “Re-thinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World

in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 69, 1 (January 2012): 3–34.

24. John Brewer, *Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 172.

25. Wafer, *New Voyage*, li–liiii.

26. Ignacio J. Gallup-Díaz, *The Door of the Seas and the Key to the Universe: Indian Politics and Imperial Rivalry in the Darien, 1640–1750* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 53–75, 90, 98.

27. *A Defence of the Scots Settlement at Darien with an Answer to the Spanish Memorial Against It* (Edinburgh, 1699), 6.

28. *Original Letters to an Honest Sailor* (London: R. Thomas, 1746), 14. During the 1739 war, at least some Dariens allied with the Spanish.

29. Indeed, the English government expressed concern that Wafer had traveled to Scotland and possibly given helpful information to territorial rivals. Wafer, *New Voyage*, lv–lvi.

30. On the failure of the Darien settlement see in particular Gallup-Díaz, *Door of the Seas*, 127–32, *passim*.

31. Francis Borland, *Memoirs of Darien, Giving a short description of that Country, with an account of the attempt of the Company of Scotland, to settle a Colonie in that Place* (Glasgow: Hugh Brown, 1715), 21.

32. William S. Goldman, “Spain and the Founding of Jamestown,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 68, 3 (July 2011): 436–39. On English intentions in Virginia, see April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 2, 7. On the successes and difficulties of the Jamestown settlement, see, for example, Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007); James Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); and the classic Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: the Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975).

33. These various approaches to imperialism would be articulated more clearly in the eighteenth century, as described in different ways by Pincus, “Rethinking Mercantilism,” 3–34, and Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 146–69. Lauren Benton notes that imperial control of territory was often porous and tenuous. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

34. Jean McLachlan, “Documents Illustrating Anglo-Spanish Trade Between the Commercial Treaty of 1667 and the Commercial Treaty and the Asiento Contract of 1713,” *Cambridge Historical Journal* 4 (1934): 300–307; George Chalmers, *A Collection of Treaties Between Great Britain and Other Powers* (London: John Stockdale, 1790), 2: 5–15. Members of each empire were allowed to move in and out of the ports of the other empire, in both commercial and military vessels. Some restrictions were placed on these movements, in order to allay fears of attacks from within and to prevent long-term

residence by members of the other empire within a kingdom's lands. These included the provision that travelers number no more than eight and stay only a short time.

35. Despite these official restrictions, some Englishmen were able to make trading connections with the Spanish American settlements, though this was not part of a large-scale or official English strategy of expansion. On the connections that did exist, see in particular Kristen Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit* (Athens: University of Georgia press, 2012); Nuala Zahedieh, "The Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655–1692," *William and Mary Quarterly* 43, 4 (October 1986): 570–93. Those who abandoned their English identity completely, like Gage, could also travel, though only small numbers of English subjects ever chose this path. Ross and Power, *Thomas Gage*. On trade and citizenship, see Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 94–118.

36. On the war, see Henry Kamen, *The War of Succession in Spain 1700–15* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969); Henry Kamen, *Philip V of Spain: The King Who Reigned Twice* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001).

37. Herman Moll, *A View of the Coasts, Countries and Islands within the Limits of the South-Sea Company* (London: Ju. Morphew, 1711), 1.

38. Burton J. Fishman, "Defoe, Herman Moll, and the Geography of South America," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 36 (May 1973): 227–38.

39. *A Letter to a Member of Parliament, on the Settling a Trade to the South-Seas of America* (London: J. Phillips, 1711), 8–9. Pincus has argued that this kind of push for expansion represented a particularly Tory approach to colonization, primarily valuing the acquisition of land, in contrast to a Whig desire for power through labor and industry instead of territory. Pincus, "Rethinking Mercantilism," 25–27.

40. *Letter to a Member of Parliament*, 9.

41. Fayrer Hall, *The Importance of the British Plantations in America to this Kingdom* (London: J. Peele, 1731), 25.

42. B. W. Hill, "Oxford, Bolingbroke, and the Peace of Utrecht," *The Historical Journal* 16 (June 1973): 241; Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Empires: The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713–1826* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 1–2.

43. Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700–1739* (Champaign: University of Illinois, 1981); Shinsuke Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell and Brewer, 2013); Victoria Gardner Sorsby, "British Trade with Spanish America Under the Asiento, 1713–1740" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1975); Geoffrey J. Walker, *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade, 1700–1789* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).

44. Paul Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 132.

45. J. D. Alsop and Robert Allen, "A Darien Epilogue: Robert Allen in Spanish America, 1698–1707" *The Americas* 43, 2 (October 1986): 197–201.

46. Robert Allen, *An Essay on the Nature and Methods of Carrying on a Trade to the South Sea* (London: 1712), ii, 17. McLachlan notes that merchants from a number of European countries operated through Cádiz in the eighteenth century as well, as that was where the annual fleets trading to the West Indies left from and returned to. McLachlan, *Trade and Peace*, 13–14.

47. Allen, *Essay on the Nature and Methods*, 18–20. The importance of trade in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for most European nations has been well-established, and some historians have suggested that trade and labor had become more important than holding land in building the empire. This study, however, suggests that many Britons were pursuing right and control of land in tandem with trade in order to build imperial and personal power. Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 147, 166.

48. The discovery of highly productive gold and silver mines in the Spanish Americas increased the need for labor above levels that could be satisfied through forced or voluntary indigenous labor. African slaves were sent to the mines as early as 1510. J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 57–99; Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440–1870* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 96–98. Scholars have made much of the structural and legal differences between English and Spanish slavery, particularly Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: Random House, 1946). See also Frederick P. Bowser, “Africans in Spanish American Colonial Society,” in *Colonial Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell, vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 357; P. J. Bakewell, *Silver Mining and Society in Colonial Mexico: Zacatecas, 1546–1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 122.

49. C. H. Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1963), 204. Parry notes that while the competing powers of Europe could have dismantled parts of the Spanish American empire, they preferred the opportunities offered by trade over actually controlling those territories. J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (Berkeley: University of California, 1966), 292; Elliott, *Empires*, 99. Bowser, “Africans in Spanish American Colonial Society,” 360.

50. K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London: Longmans, 1960), 44–46.

51. Davies, *Royal African Company*, 213–90.

52. There have been several excellent studies of the South Sea Company and its trade, though they do not address the national and imperial intermixture that its trade created in depth. Colin Palmer’s work provides a very useful overview of the structure of the trade, the numbers and demographics of slaves being transported, and the profitability of the trade. Palmer, *Human Cargoes*; see also Jorge Palacios Preciado, *La trata de negros por Cartagena de Indias* (Tunja: Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, 1973); Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War*; Sorsby, “British Trade with Spanish America.”

53. McLachlan, *Trade and Peace*, 46.

54. Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, 60. On the port cities of the British and Spanish

empires and beyond, see in particular J. R. McNeill, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain: Louisbourg and Havana, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) and Franklin K. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, eds., *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

55. The English had previously been promised some limited protections from prosecution or religious threat, with treaties in 1604 and 1645. The latter noted that the English were allowed to practice their Protestant religion and to have their oaths accepted in court “as if they were natural Spaniards,” protections echoed in the *asiento* treaty. James Leitch Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in North America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 31; Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 60; Loomie, “Religion and Elizabethan Commerce with Spain,” 28, 47; “Cedula of Privileges granted by His Majesty to the English which reside in Seville, San Lucar, Cádiz, and Malaga: Zaragossa, 19 March 1645,” in Edward Herstlet, *Treaties and Tariffs Regulating the Trade Between Great Britain and Foreign Nations . . . Part V, Spain* (London: Buttersworths, 1878), 12.

56. Peter Silver notes the expansion of the War of Jenkins’s Ear especially beyond the bounds of the Atlantic in “A Rotten Colossus: The Americas in the War of Jenkins’s Ear,” presented at the William and Mary Quarterly workshop titled “Territorial Crossings” and summarized in Eric Hinderaker and Rebecca Horn, “Territorial Crossings: Histories and Historiographies of the Early Americas,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 67 (July 2010): 395–432. The present study draws on the conceptual frameworks of Atlantic history, though the scope of the trade means that this is a wider story. On Atlantic history and global history, see David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault, eds., *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Alison Games, “Beyond the Atlantic: English Globetrotters and Transoceanic Connections,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (October 2006): 675–92; Peter Coclanis, “Atlantic World or Atlantic/World,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (October 2006): 725–42.

57. Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 15. Elliott’s *Empires of the Atlantic World* provides an excellent comparison of the British and Spanish empires that nonetheless omits the Caribbean, the area of greatest overlap between the empires. Reintegrating this area into histories of these empires allows for a more complex understanding of the operation of empires.

58. Operating in areas claimed by multiple empires could lead to complex problems of jurisdiction and power. See in particular Benton, *Search for Sovereignty*, 104–61.

59. An excellent history of both empires by J. H. Elliott, for instance, provides

compelling insight into the cores of the British and Spanish Americas, but focuses on comparison rather than interaction and considers the mainland colonies in greater depth than the Caribbean, where in fact the most intense and long-standing interactions took place. Elliott, *Empires*. For comparisons between the empires, see also Liss, *Atlantic Empires*; Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); James Mahoney, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

60. On interconnection, see Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12; Gould, “Entangled Histories”; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550–1700* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006); on the importance of the French to the formation of Britain and its empire, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992). On connections between the English and Dutch Atlantic worlds, see Christian Koot, *Empire at the Periphery: British Colonists, Anglo-Dutch Trade, and the Development of the British Atlantic, 1621–1713* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). For recent work on the empires of the Americas and their entanglements, see in particular Kristin Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire*; Michael J. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680–1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Linda M. Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

61. Hinderaker and Horn, “Territorial Crossings,” 426.

62. Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 195. On the commercial aspects of empire, see in particular Games, *Web of Empire*; David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Philip J. Stern, *Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

63. On the South Sea Bubble, see in particular Malcolm Balen, *A Very English Deceit: The Secret History of the South Sea Bubble and the First Great Financial Scandal* (London: Fourth Estate, 2002); John Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble*, rev. ed. (Dover, N.H.: Alan Sutton, 1993); Richard Dale, *The First Crash: Lessons from the South Sea Bubble* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Helen J. Paul, *The South Sea Bubble: An Economic History of Its Origins and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution, 1620–1720* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 197–248.

64. These histories have been critical to reconstructing the historical record of the early eighteenth-century Americas and the coming of the 1739 war. Lucy Frances

Horsfall, “British Relations with the Spanish Colonies in the Caribbean, 1713–1739” (Master’s Thesis, King’s College London, 1936); McLachlan, *Trade and Peace*; Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies: 1739–1763* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1963); Palmer, *Human Cargoes*; Rafael Donoso Anes, *El asiento de esclavos con Inglaterra (1713–1750): Su contexto histórico y sus aspectos económicos y contables* (Sevilla: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 2010); Preciado, *La trata de negros*; Geoffrey J. Walker, *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade, 1700–1789* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1979).

65. This blurring of empires extended to imperial identities for those who moved between empires, some of who chose to shift their allegiances, religious, economic, and national, during their time at the edge of empire. On other movements between empires, see Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007). If British identity was becoming more salient and British imperial ideology becoming more developed in Great Britain through the 1730s and 1740s, as noted by Armitage and Colley, in the liminal spaces of the West Indies individuals found it easier to move between identities and advocate for a variety of imperial alternatives through much of the early eighteenth century. Armitage, *Ideological Origins*.

66. This biographical approach to explaining larger historical contexts has been quite successfully deployed by many historians, including Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990); Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*; Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean*. On the value of biography, see the American Historical Review roundtable “Historians and Biography,” *American Historical Review* 114:3 (June 2009): 573–661.

67. On competing plans for the construction of the British Empire, see Pincus, “Rethinking Mercantilism.”

68. On the British government’s lack of involvement with American questions in the early eighteenth century, see James A. Henretta, “*Salutary Neglect*”: *Colonial Administration Under the Duke of Newcastle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).

Chapter 1. Britain Hopes for the “Riches of America,” 1713–1716

1. The court of directors announced its choice of factors at Buenos Aires, Cartagena, and Veracruz September 17, 1714, Add. Mss. 25495, f. 205, BL. Though several article- and book-length biographies of Dover have been written, none, including an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, noted his connection to the South Sea Company as a factor until Kenneth Dewhurst and Rex Doublet, “Thomas Dover and the South Sea Company,” *Medical History* 18 (1974): 107–21. For more on Dover, see Kenneth Dewhurst, *The Quicksilver Doctor: The Life and Times of Thomas Dover, Physician and Adventurer* (Bristol: Wright, 1957); A. G. Strong, *Dr. Quicksilver, 1660–1742: the life and times of Thomas Dover, M.D.* (London: Melrose, 1955).

2. Woodes Rogers, *A Cruising Voyage Round the World* (London, 1712), 176, 310; Thomas Dover, *The Ancient Physician's Legacy to his Country, being what he has collected in Forty-nine years Practice* (London: R. Bradley, 1733), 69.

3. Dionisio de Alcedo Ugarte y Herrera, *Compendio histórico de la provincia, partidos, ciudades, astilleros, ríos y puerto de Guayaquil* (Madrid: Miguel Fernandez, 1741), 89.

4. Dover, *The Ancient Physician's Legacy*, 6.

5. In their public statements, these merchants stressed the ways in which the trade would help the nation, rather than their own profits. For instance, company employee James Houstoun celebrates the benefits of the slave trade for the British nation. Houstoun, *Dr. Houstoun's Memoirs of His Own Life-Time* (London: Jacob Bickerstaff, 1747), 147.

6. Christian J. Koot, *Empire at the Periphery: British Colonists, Anglo-Dutch Trade, and the Development of the British Atlantic, 1621–1713* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 196. Richard Pares, “Barbados History from the Records of the Prize Courts 3. A Trader with the Enemy, 1702: Manuel M. Gilligan,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 6, 2 (1939): 59–66.

7. *The Assiento: or Contract for Allowing the Subjects of Great Britain the Liberty of Importing Negroes into the Spanish America* (London: John Baskett, 1713), 1.

8. Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700–1739* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 10; Andrea Weindl, “The Asiento de Negros and International Law,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 10 (2008): 229–57; *Assiento*, 3, 6.

9. Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Empires: The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713–1826* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 9; Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, 60.

10. *Assiento*, 45.

11. Geoffrey J. Walker, *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade, 1700–1789* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 74, 113; Elena F. S. Studer, *La Trata de negros en el Río de la Plata durante el siglo XVIII* (Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1958), 152.

12. Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Historia general del Perú* (Lima: C. Milla Batres, 1966), 131.

13. Joseph de Veitia Linage, *The Spanish Rule of Trade to the West-Indies: Containing an Account of the Casa de Contratacion, or India-House*, 2nd ed. (London: 1720), n.p.

14. *Assiento*, 5. This would cause a problem for the company, as they were required to pay the duty even on slaves they did not import, if they imported fewer than the stipulated number. *Considerations on the American Trade, Before and Since the Establishment of the South Sea Company* (London: J. Roberts, 1739), 9.

15. John Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble*, rev. ed. (Dover, N.H.: Alan Sutton, 1993), 55.

16. Paul W. Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 123; Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 42.

17. On the company's early designs, see Shinsuke Satsuma, "The South Sea Company and Its Plan for a Naval Expedition in 1712," *Historical Research* 85 (August 2012): 410–29.

18. Abstract of the Charter of the Governor and Company of Merchants of Great Britain, Trading to the South-Seas, and other parts of America, for Encouraging the Fishery. Add. Mss. 25494, f. 2, 6, BL. Though this printed document is undated, it is in a collection of manuscripts from the 1711–1713 period.

19. Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, 8–9.

20. Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble*, 241.

21. On the financial aspects of the company, see Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble*.

22. On the South Sea Company in the Americas and its slaving activities, see in particular Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, and Helen J. Paul, *The South Sea Bubble: An Economic History of Its Origins and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

23. Indeed, Great Britain would not abolish its slave trade until half a century after the end of the *asiento* trade. See in particular Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 205–41.

24. Shinsuke Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War in the Early Eighteenth Century: Silver, Seapower, and the Atlantic* (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell, 2013), 163–71.

25. The Navigation Acts, reiterated and refined throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, required that most trade to the colonies be conducted by British ships, and restricted colonial produce from being sent anywhere but England. For most of this period, the British did not vigorously enforce these laws. Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624–1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 249–54, 307–8.

26. *Assiento*, 7.

27. On early English troubles with the Inquisition, see Adrian Finucane, "British Traders, Religion, and the *Asiento* in Spanish American Port Cities," in *Governing the Sea in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Carole Shammas and Peter C. Mancall (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library Press, 2014), 197–221.

28. Abstract of the Charter of the Governor and Company of Merchants of Great Britain. Add. Mss. 25494, f. 9, BL.

29. *Assiento*, 13.

30. A 1725 *cedula* from the Spanish king specifically allowed two or three Britons to go into otherwise off-limits inland areas to bring slaves to markets. July 28, 1725, Ind. 2769, Legado 8, f. 297–98, AGI. See also the Marquis de Grimaldo's letter to William Stanhope, June 22, 1725, Add. Mss. 25562, f. 208, BL.

31. Court of Directors, February 4, 1724. Add. Mss. 25564, f. 96, BL.

32. English traders in Europe had faced problems in Catholic countries for many decades. See, for example, Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 100.

33. *Assiento*, 10.

34. This stipulation was reinforced in a 1716 royal order to the governor of Buenos

Aires to allow the local factors to build only out of wood, and only in ways that would not constitute fortification. Ind. 2769, Leg. 8, f. 41v, AGI.

35. *Assiento*, 11.

36. Liss stresses the importance of British control of the legitimate trade to Spain in *Atlantic Empires*, 2.

37. *Assiento*, 23–25.

38. Ind. 2769, Leg. 8, f. 2, AGI.

39. John Lynch, *Bourbon Spain, 1700–1808* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), 36, 144–51.

40. John Pullen, *Memoirs of the Maritime Affairs of Great Britain* (London: T. Astley, 1732), 14–15.

41. This population, according to Modyford, was as large as 1,500 buccaneers. Trevor Burnard, “European Migration to Jamaica, 1655–1780,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (October 1996): 771.

42. Walker, *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade*, 154–56.

43. Nuala Zahedieh, “Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655–1692,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (October 1986): 590. Governor Molesworth and many on the island enumerated the benefits of the free Spanish trade in 1688. K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 2nd ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 332.

44. Curtis Nettels, “England and the Spanish-American Trade, 1680–1715,” *Journal of Modern History* 3:1 (March 1931): 20.

45. For his part, the sloop’s captain insisted he was bringing the slaves to Carolina. South Sea House February 6, 1716, Add. Mss. 25563, f. 6, BL.

46. Fayer Hall, *The Importance of British Plantations in America to this Kingdom* (London, 1731), 53.

47. On these protests and their connection to the Royal African Company, see Victoria Gardner Sorsby, “British Trade with Spanish America Under the Asiento, 1713–1740” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1975), 19. This conflict between interests who wanted a strict mercantilism and those who resented the state regulation of trade had caused tension in the empire from the late seventeenth century. April Lee Hatfield, “Slavery, Trade, War, and the Purposes of Empire,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 68, 3 (July 2011): 407.

48. “A Gentleman who has resided several years in Jamaica,” *The Trade Granted to the South-Sea-Company: Considered with Relation to Jamaica* (London: Samuel Crouch, 1714), 23. A pamphlet of the same year by Samuel Page claims that the author of this pamphlet has stolen Page’s own ideas about the matter for profit: *The Representation of Dr. Samuel Page to the South-Sea Company* (London: 1714).

49. William Wood, *The assiento contract consider’d. As also, the advantages and decay of the trade in Jamaica and the plantations, with the causes and consequences thereof: In several letters to a member of Parliament* (London: Ferd. Burleigh, 1714), 6.

50. Wood, *The assiento contract consider’d*, 6, 8.

51. John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, money, and the English State, 1688–1793* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 125; Carswell, *South Sea Bubble*.

52. Steve Pincus, “Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 69, 1 (January 2012): 26–27.

53. Carswell, *South Sea Bubble*, 39.

54. Shinsuke Satsuma, “The South Sea Company and Its Plan for a Naval Expedition in 1712,” *Historical Research* 85:229 (August 2012): 413.

55. *The Considerable Advantages of a South-Sea Trade to our English Nation* (London: S. Popping, n.d.), 7.

56. Daniel Defoe, *A True Account of the Design, and Advantages of the South-Sea Trade: With Answers to All the Objections Rais'd Against It* (London: 1711), 9–20. On the Royal African Company, see Davies, *The Royal African Company*; Kenneth Morgan, ed., *The British Transatlantic Slave Trade*, vol. 2 (Brookfield: Pickering & Chatto, 2003); on its factors, see in particular David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 175–86.

57. Daniel Defoe, *An Essay on the South-Sea Trade. With an Enquiry into the Grounds and Reasons of the Present Dislike and Complaint . . .* 2nd ed. (London: 1712), 38.

58. Defoe to Harley, n.d. (1711?), Add. Mss.70291, f. 9, BL.

59. Defoe, *Essay on the South-Sea Trade*, 38–39. Jane H. Jack notes that the enthusiasm for a British settlement in South America is present in much of Defoe's other work as well, particularly his *General History of the Principal Discoveries and Improvements in Useful Arts* (1726–1727) and *Review*. Jack, “‘A New Voyage Round the World’: Defoe's ‘Roman a These,’” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 24:4 (August 1961): 323–36.

60. On Bolingbroke, see Glyndwr Williams, “‘The Inexhaustible Fountain of Gold’: English Projects and Ventures in the South Seas, 1670–1750,” in *Perspectives of Empire*, ed. John E. Flint and Glyndwr Williams (London: Longman, 1973), 51; on Defoe, Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War*, 58.

61. July 23, 1711, Defoe to ?, Add. Mss. 70291, f. 23, BL.

62. Burton J. Fishman, “Defoe, Herman Moll, and the Geography of South America,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 36:3 (May 1973): 227–38. Glyndwr Williams notes that Defoe's vision for the Americas was different, and “more constructive,” than the plans of the privateers and pirates of the previous century. Williams, *The Great South Sea: English Voyages and Encounters, 1570–1750* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 170; Williams, *Perspectives of Empire*, 33.

63. Kings Mss. 73, f. 73, BL.

64. In his chapter on the profitability of the South Sea Company slave trade, Palmer notes the difficulty of accurately calculating the costs and profits of the company. He concludes that the company was profitable, but that a significant portion of the money could not be collected successfully, lowering the actual profits significantly. Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, esp. 155.

65. On the extensive contraband trade in the region, see especially Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997).

66. Jean O. McLachlan, *Trade and Peace with Old Spain, 1667–1750: A Study of the Influence of Commerce on Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, 1940), 61. McLachlan notes that Bolingbroke hoped the South Sea Company would, in its new position, be able to prosecute foreign contraband trade while supporting and protecting British contraband interests.

67. Add. Mss. 25562, f. 17, 23, 24–27, BL.

68. Ugarte, *Historia general del Perú*, 110.

69. *Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, vol. 6, 1702–1714 (London: Longman et al., 1810), 1362.

70. Henry Partington to the Court of Directors, February 16, 1714/15. ADM 1/2281, n.f., TNA.

71. Dewhurst and Doublet, “Thomas Dover,” 113.

72. Davies, *Royal African Company*, 44–46.

73. An Account of the Proceedings of the Court of Directors of the So Sea Company from their first Institution in Relation to Trade. Kings Mss. 73, f. 15, 223, 63, BL. These slaves were to be delivered at Jamaica then carried on in Company ships. Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble*, 55.

74. Davies, *Royal African Company*, 344.

75. On the mixing of religious and commercial groups in the West Indies during the seventeenth century, see in particular Kristin Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

76. In the Americas, illegal trade could often be conducted somewhat openly, as in New Orleans. Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 103.

77. There are significant points of comparison between these Caribbean conflicts and those internal to the Old World. Linda Colley argues for attention to the “deals and compromises constantly going on between European and non-European powers,” in contrast to the focus on “opposition and antagonism” that is usual in the historiography, and the present study makes a similar argument for the British and Spanish in the Americas. Colley, *Captives: Briton, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 69.

78. The dangers of the climate in the Caribbean and surrounding regions is covered in depth in J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Long, *History of Jamaica* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 2:556.

79. Partington reported from the River Plate in September 24, 1715, ADM 1/2281, n.f., TNA.

80. ADM 1/2281, n.f., n.d., TNA.

81. Susan M. Socolow, “Buenos Aires: Atlantic Port and Hinterland in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 240–46.

82. Gaining this concession took some convincing. As Colin Palmer has noted, the Court encouraged Spanish officials to agree that they could move slaves inland in part by stressing the dangers of keeping large numbers of enslaved African laborers in the city of Buenos Aires. Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, 70–71.

83. Studer, *Trata de negros*, 204.

84. In fact, only about 2,000 whites lived in Jamaica in 1700, a number that grew during the first half of the century. Michael Craton, *Empire, Enslavement, and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1997), 89.

85. Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Nieves, S. Christophers, and Jamaica* (London: B.M., 1707), xlvi; Additional instructions for our trusty & well beloved Sir Nicholas Lawes, January 16, 1717/18, CO 137/14/113, TNA.

86. Charles Leslie, *A New and Exact Account of Jamaica* (Edinburgh: R. Fleming, 1740), 38–39.

87. Antonio de Ulloa, *A Voyage to South America: Describing at Large, the Spanish Cities, Towns, Provinces, &c. on that Extensive Continent*, 2nd ed. (London: L. Davis and C. Reymers, 1760, first pub. 1758), 24–25; Sloane, *A Voyage to the Island of Madera*, lxxxii.

88. Ulloa, *Voyage to South America*, 29–42.

89. Grahm, “Cartagena and Its Hinterland in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 171–78.

90. Allan J. Kuethe, “Cardinal Alberoni and Reform in the American Empire,” in *Early Bourbon Spanish America: Politics and Society in a Forgotten Era (1700–1759)*, ed. Francisco A. Eissa-Barroso and Ainara Vázquez Varela (Boston: Brill, 2013), 29–35.

91. Lynch, *Bourbon Spain*, 145; Charles Gibson, *Spain in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 167.

92. James Houstoun, surgeon to the Cartagena factory, notes that this would be a two-day journey by mule. Houstoun, *The Works of James Houstoun, MD Containing the Memoirs of His Life and Travels in Asia, Africa, America, and most Parts of Europe* (London: S. Bladon, 1753), 15.

93. Ulloa, *Voyage to South America*, 91.

94. A Gentleman who had resided several years in Jamaica, *The Trade Granted to the South Sea Company: Considered with Relation to Jamaica* (London: Samuel Crouch, 1714), 29.

95. Ulloa, *Voyage to South America*, 97.

96. Christopher Ward, *Imperial Panama: Commerce and Conflict in Isthmian America, 1550–1800* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 18–19, 80–87.

97. Ulloa, *Voyage to South America*, 102–5. It is unclear whether this number

indicated the tonnage in cargo, the tonnage the ship could carry, or the registered tonnage of the ship. On the tricky issue of tonnage measurements, see John J. McCusker, “The Tonnage of Ships Engaged in British Colonial Trade during the Eighteenth Century,” in *Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic World*, ed. McCusker (New York: Routledge, 1997), 43–75. Thanks to Michael Block for pointing me toward this literature. Ward, *Imperial Panama*, 154; Vargas Ugarte, *Historia general del Perú*, 131; Gage quoted in Ward, *Imperial Panama*, 67; Walker, *Spanish Politics*, 74; Grahn, *Political Economy of Smuggling*, 4.

98. Inventory of the Veracruz factory February 27, 1740. Ind. 2786, n.f., AGI.

99. Cartagena had just this breakdown of factors at one point in 1732. Minutes of the Committee of Correspondence of the South Sea Company. November 15, 1732. Add. Mss. 25553, f. 147, BL.

100. This became an issue, as the Spanish government complained that the presence of the supercargoes violated the eleventh article of the *asiento*, which limited the number of Britons in the factories to four to six. The Court of Directors insisted that the contract said nothing about the supercargoes, and that they had carefully restricted their numbers in these ports. Letter from Wescomb to the Duke of Newcastle November 3, 1724. Add. Mss. 32741, BL.

101. The *asiento* contract permitted the factors to hire servants and colleagues from among the Spanish. *Assiento*, 13. One case of British servants living in a South Sea Company factor can be found in a letter from the Buenos Aires factory. *Assiento* House November 5, 1730. Add. Mss. 25553, f. 111–112, BL. The presence of English musicians present in Caracas for several months “at the governors request” is recorded in a letter from Samuel Collit, September 12, 1734. Add. Mss. 32785, f. 457, BL.

102. Letter from the Court of Directors to the Factory at Veracruz February 8, 1716. Letters almost identical to this one were sent to each of the company’s factories at the beginning of the trade. Add. Mss. 25563, f. 7, BL.

103. William (sic) Dover, President at Buenos Ayres January 13, 1716 (NS), to the Rt Hble the Prince of Wales. Add. Mss. 24221, f. 1–2, BL.

104. This British interest in taking over land and exploiting natural and mineral wealth continued well into the eighteenth century, contrary to the characterization of this as a particularly Spanish behavior in later colonization by Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, 1500–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 73.

105. Letter to Factors of the Royal Asiento Company of Great Britain at Veracruz, February 8, 1716. Add. Mss. 25563, f. 11–17, BL.

106. Benjamin Woolley, *The Particulars into the Enquiry into Mr. Woolley’s Conduct; and his Being Stationed, by the Court of Directors of the South-Sea Company, First Factor at Porto Bello and Panama* (London, 1735), 10.

107. Petiver to William Bumpsted for Cartagena, January 10, 1715. Sloane Mss. 3340, f. 67, BL; Kathleen S. Murphy, “Collecting Slave Traders: James Petiver, Natural History, and the British Slave Trade,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 70, 4 (October 2013): 637–70.

108. Letter from the Court of Directors to the Factory at Buenos Aires, March 7, 1717. Add. Mss. 25563, f. 144–9, BL.

109. Letter from the Court of Directors to the Factory at Veracruz. n.d. Add. Mss. 25563, f. 59, BL.

110. Letter from the Court of Directors to the Factory at Buenos Aires. December 12, 1723. Add. Mss. 25564, f. 8, BL.

111. Minutes of the Court of Directors. September 22, 1714. Add. Mss. 25469, f. 206, BL.

112. Minutes of the Court of Directors. June 15, 1715. Add. Mss. 25496, f. 41, BL.

113. Translation of a letter from the president of Panama to the Marquis of Monteleon. October 28, 1715. Add. Mss. 25562, f. 72, BL. A similar problem occurred in Cartagena in November 1714. Kings Mss. 73, f. 76v, BL.

114. Ind. 2769, Leg. 8, f. 16v, AGI.

115. Sorsby, “British Trade with Spanish America,” 170–79; Rafael Donoso Anes, “Accounting and Slavery: the Accounts of the English South Sea Company, 1713–1722,” *European Accounting Review* 11:2 (2002): 445; Walker, *Spanish Politics*, 81; Reales Cédulas Originales v. 37, f. 279, November 12, 1716, AGN.

116. Rafael Donoso Anes, “El Barco Annual de Permiso del Asiento de Esclavos con Inglaterra: El caso del Viaje a la Vera Cruz del Navio *La Real Carolina* en 1732,” *Revista de Historia Naval* 93 (2006): 70.

117. Jorge Palacios Preciado, *La Trata de Negros por Cartagena de Indias, 1650–1750* (Tunja: Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, 1973), 183. Spanish officials complained of flour being smuggled through the South Sea Company factory at Cartagena in 1726. March 2, 1726, Ind. 2769, Leg. 8, f. 313r, AGI. Flour was also smuggled into Caracas before the establishment of a factory there, from Jamaica and the Dutch colonies: Proposals for the Royal Assiento Companies Carrying on a Trade to the Windward Coast of the North Seas of America. Shelburne Collection 43, unnumbered folio, no date, CL. Even British merchants complained about the company’s supplying the area with staples: because of the company’s presence in the market, the merchants in Old Spain bought less from British traders there, explaining that the market was already saturated. Charles Townshend, 1730, Some Considerations upon the Assiento Contract, Sydney Papers, CL. By the late eighteenth century, large amounts of flour flowed from British North America to the Spanish Caribbean colonies, sometimes closing those markets to Spanish merchants. Sherry Johnson, *Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba and the Atlantic World in the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 80; Grahn, *Political Economy of Smuggling*, 176–77.

118. Grahn, *Political Economy of Smuggling*, 124–25.

119. Ugarte, *Historia general del Perú*, 135.

120. Letter from Archibald Hamilton to Mr. Secretary Stanhope, Jamaica, November 14, 1715. CO 137/11, f. 3, TNA.

121. Letter from Archibald Hamilton to Secretary Stanhope, Jamaica, February 27, 1716. CO 137/12, f. 30, TNA.

122. Memorial from Lord Archibald Hamilton to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, March 16, 1716. CO 137/13, f. 104, TNA.

123. Ibid.

124. Letter from Archibald Hamilton to Secretary Stanhope, Jamaica, February 27, 1716. CO 137/12/30, TNA.

125. Letter from Colonel Heywood to the Governor of the Havana, August 16, 1716. CO 137/12/79, TNA.

126. Letter from Thomas Onslow to the Secretary from Jamaica August 1716. CO 137/12/35, TNA; Richard B. Sheridan, "The Formation of Caribbean Plantation Society, 1689–1748," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. William Roger Louis, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 410.

127. Studer, *Trata de Negros*, 183.

128. Copy of Mr. Bubb's letter to Mr. Secry Stanhope February 10, 1716, Eg. Mss. 2171, f. 101v, BL.; Copy of Mr. Bubb's letter to Mr. Stanhope Madrid April 20, 1716. Eg. Mss. 2171, f. 292, BL.

129. Many of the details of this treaty can be found in both George Bubb to Secretary Stanhope, Madrid, June 4, 1714, SP 94/85, f. 171, TNA, and in June 12, 1716, Ind. 2785, f. 142, AGI. The latter is a pamphlet printed in Spanish, with an appended note indicating it was submitted to George Bubb and sent to England September 12, 1716.

130. Ibid.

131. Ibid.

132. Memorandum of Some Particular Grievances Under which the Company Labours. London March 25, 1725. Add. Mss. 25556, f. 63–5, BL.

133. Block, *Ordinary Lives*, 210.

134. Kennet Dewhurst and Rex Doublet, "Thomas Dover and the South Sea Company," *Medical History* 18 (1974): 116. Dewhurst and Doublet suggest that this was the result both of Dover's private trade and his inability to cheerfully accept orders from his superiors.

135. *Weekly Packet*, August 18–25, 1716. In company correspondence this man is referred to as Thrupp or Thruppe, though in the *Packet* he is listed as Thrubb.

136. To Mesers John Thruppe . . . Factors to the Royal Assiento Company at Buenos Ayres South Sea House London January 24, 1716, Add. Mss. 25563, f. 1–1v, BL.

Chapter 2. The Stuttering Success of the Early Trade, 1717–1728

1. Kathleen S. Murphy, "Collecting Slave Traders: James Petiver, Natural History, and the British Slave Trade" *William and Mary Quarterly* 70, 4 (October, 2013): 666.

2. Court of Directors, August 8, 1716. Add. Mss. 25469, f. 147, BL.

3. South Sea Company Cast of Treaty of England and Spain of 1713 and 1717 re tonnage of yearly ship. August 10, 1722. MS 1369, NLJ.

4. Geoffrey J. Walker, *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade, 1700–1789* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 131.

5. *Weekly Journal or British Gazeteer*, Saturday, June 28, 1718. The issue had improved a few years later, when the Spanish king allowed the company to send the goods that remained from the fair inland for sale just as Spanish merchants did. Heads of sundry matters necessary to the reestablishment of the Asiento trade, to which the Company are entitled to be restored under the Treaty of Seville with some Explanations. September 1721. Add. Mss. 33032, f. 45v, BL.

6. John Lynch, *Bourbon Spain, 1700–1808* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), 145; Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997), 108–11.

7. John Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble*, rev. ed. (Dover, N.H.: Alan Sutton, 1993), 64.

8. Frank Wesley Pitman, *The Development of the British West Indies, 1700–1763* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1917), 83.

9. *Jamaica Courant*, April 15, 1719.

10. On further complaints about the restriction of the Jamaican trade to Spanish America following the asiento contract, see Charles King, *The British Merchant: A Collection of Papers Relating to the Trade and Commerce of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1743), 3: 217–18.

11. J. Leitch Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in North America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 71; Max Savelle, *Empires to Nation: Expansion in America, 1713–1824* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 123–24.

12. *Jamaica Courant*, February 11, 1718/19.

13. His Majesty's Declaration of War against the King of Spain. December 16, 1718. HCA 1/30/118, TNA.

14. George Shelvocke, *A Voyage Round the World by Way of the Great South Sea* (London: J. Senex, 1726), xi.

15. *Jamaica Courant*, April 15, 1719.

16. Deposition of Laurence Van Huesslan, September 11, 1716, Jamaica. In A Person who resided several Years at Jamaica, *The State of the Island of Jamaica. Chiefly in relation to its commerce, and the Conduct of the Spaniards in the West-Indies* (London: H. Whitridge, 1726), 69–70.

17. Extract of a letter from Mr. John Kelly, dated at Port Royall, Jamaica April 30, 1719. CO 137/13/166, TNA.

18. For other British calls for deregulation, see April Lee Hatfield, "Slavery, Trade, War, and the Purposes of Empire," *William and Mary Quarterly* 68, 3 (July 2011): 406–7.

19. Elena F. S. Studer, *La trata de negros en el Río de la Plata durante el siglo XVIII* (Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1958), 205; Carswell, *South Sea Bubble*, 64.

20. *Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post*, Saturday, February 7, 1719. Satsuma argues that the company and the British Government undertook no serious plans for colonization from the beginning of the asiento trade to the 1730s. Shinsuke Satsuma, "The South Sea Company and Its Plan for a Naval Expedition in 1712," *Historical Research* 85 (August 2012): 410–29.

21. The copy of this map in the holdings of the John Carter Brown Library is labeled as having a publication date of 1708–1720, though Dennis Reinhartz argues that Moll produced it in 1713–1715, suggesting that the 1715 wreck of the Spanish treasure fleet sparked his interest in the area. Reinhartz, *The Cartographer and the Literati: Herman Moll and His Intellectual Circle* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1997), 42.

22. Extract of a letter from Mr. John Kelly, dated at Port Royall, Jamaica April 30, 1719. CO 137/13/166, TNA.

23. O. Nigel Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance in Belize: Essays in Historical Sociology* (Benque Viejo del Carmen, Belize: Cubola, 1988), 19–20; *Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica* 2 (August 23, 1717): 247.

24. Glyndwr Williams, “‘The Inexhaustible Fountain of Gold’: English Projects and Ventures in the South Seas, 1670–1750,” in *Perspectives of Empire*, ed. John E. Flint and Glyndwr Williams (Longman: London, 1973), 46; Shinsuke Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War in the Early Eighteenth Century: Silver, Seapower, and the Atlantic* (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell, 2013), 241.

25. This is based on Burnet’s testimony about his early life and his time in the employ of the South Sea Company, from information in the Archivo General de Simancas in Vera Lee Brown, “The South Sea Company and Contraband Trade,” *American Historical Review* 31, 4 (July 1926): 670.

26. Burnet, quoted in Raymond Phineas Stearns, *Science in the British Colonies of America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 387.

27. Letter from John Burnet to Hans Sloane. Cartagena, August 6, 1723. Sloane Mss. 4047, f. 29, f. 329, BL.

28. Official Copies of Letters and Instructions from the Court of Directors of the South Sea Company to their Factors Abroad. February 22, 1716. Add. Mss. 25563, f. 18, BL.

29. Letter from John Burnet to Hans Sloane, Kingston, November 30, 1716. Sloane Mss. 4044, f. 250, BL.

30. Murphy, “Collecting Slave Traders,” 666.

31. Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 111, 123.

32. Letter from Robert Millar, Kingston, Jamaica, February 12, 1737/8, CO 5/639/86, TNA.

33. Stearns, *Science in the British Colonies*, 326–29.

34. Letter from Robert Millar, Kingston, Jamaica, May 26, 1738. CO 5/640/105, TNA.

35. The tropical environment of the Caribbean made it a particularly rich source of unusual specimens for those from Great Britain. Parrish, *American Curiosity*, 19.

36. Burnet explains that he intended to send a pair of live specimens, but was unable to keep the animals alive; “therefore I send you the old ones skin stuffed & the young one in spirits that you may see I did not forgett what you encharged me with.” Letter from John Burnet to Hans Sloane, Cartagena, April 6, 1722, Sloane Mss. 4046, f. 227, BL.

37. Kay Dian Kriz notes the importance of men of science to commercial success. Kriz, “Curiosities, Commodities, and Transplanted Bodies in Hans Sloane’s ‘Natural History of Jamaica,’” *William and Mary Quarterly* 57 (January 2000): 41–42.

38. Richard Drayton notes the coincidental development and interrelation of the Scientific Revolution and the formation of the British empire; scientific knowledge allowed the empire to both partially understand and ideologically claim new lands and species. Drayton, “Knowledge and Empire,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. William Roger Louis, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 231, 234.

39. Letter from John Burnet to Hans Sloane. Cartagena August 6, 1723. Sloane Mss. 4047, f. 29, BL. Murphy, “Collecting Slave Traders,” 645.

40. See for instance John B. Blake, “The Inoculation Controversy in Boston: 1721–1722,” *The New England Quarterly* 25 (December 1952): 489–506; Larry Stewart, “The Edge of Utility: Slaves and Smallpox in the Early Eighteenth Century,” *Medical History* 29 (January 1985): 54–70.

41. Letter from John Burnet to Hans Sloane. Cartagena April 7, 1725. Sloane Mss. 4047, f. 333, BL.

42. Letter from John Burnet to Hans Sloane, Buenos Ayres, March 29, 1716. Sloane Mss. 3322, f. 91, BL.

43. Letter from John Burnet, no addressee. May 14, 1716. Sloane Mss. 4065, f. 248, BL.

44. Slaves and native informants were vital sources of information for men of science in this period in the Americas. Parrish, *American Curiosity*, 17–18.

45. Letter from John Burnet to Hans Sloane, Cartagena April 6, 1722. Sloane Mss. 4046, f. 227, BL.

46. Ibid. Religious men were apparently considered an excellent source of scientific information. James Petiver encouraged South Sea Company surgeon William Toller to seek friendships with local Jesuits in search of botanical information. Stearns, *Science in the British Colonies*, 384, n. 153. Jesuits were also involved with a great deal of the contraband trade into the Spanish empire. Grahn, *Political Economy of Smuggling*, 132–34.

47. Letter from John Burnet to Hans Sloane. Cartagena February 24, 1724. Sloane Mss. 4047, f. 323, BL.

48. Letter from the Court of Directors to the Factory at Buenos Aires, December 12, 1723. Add. Mss. 25564, f. 8, BL.

49. Letter from Court of Directors to William Bumpstead and the other Supra Cargoes of the Royal George, November 19, 1724. Add. Mss. 25564, f. 78–79, BL.

50. These numbers are drawn from tables in Colin Palmer’s *Human Cargoes*, detailing the number of ships and slaves to Panama, Portobello, Buenos Aires, Cartagena, Havana, Caracas, Veracruz, Maracaibo, and Campeche based on his research in the Archivo General de Indias. See especially Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700–1739* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 97–111. For the entire 1713–1739 period, ships owned by the South Sea Company alone transported 34,471 enslaved African laborers into the ports of Spanish America and Jamaica, some

for reexport, on 115 voyages, as recorded in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database at slavevoyages.org.

51. See especially Grahm, *Political Economy of Smuggling*; George H. Nelson, “Contraband Trade under the Asiento, 1730–1739,” *American Historical Review* 5 (October 1945): 55–67.

52. John G. Sperling, *The South Sea Company: An Historical Essay and Bibliographical Finding List* (Boston: Baker Library, 1962), 39.

53. K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 2nd ed. (New York: Athenaeum, 1970), 44–46. Historians disagree on the course of the relationship between the Royal African Company and the South Sea Company. In her collection, Elizabeth Donnan suggests that the companies signed a new agreement in 1724 or 1725, while both Davies and Sperling say the trade had effectively stalled at this point. Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America*, vol. 2 (Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1931), xxxvi; Davies, *Royal African Company*, 344; Sperling, *The South Sea Company*, 39.

54. Davies, *Royal African Company*, 344.

55. Sperling, *The South Sea Company*, 27–35; Carswell, *South Sea Bubble*; Malcolm Balen, *The Secret History of the South Sea Bubble: The World’s First Great Financial Scandal* (New York: Fourth Estate, 2003).

56. Shelvocke, *A Voyage Round the World*, 334.

57. This characterization is widespread, and is supported by recent histories of piracy such as Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 8. Clinton V. Black further narrows this to note that the biggest decade for West Indian piracy was 1714 to 1724. Black, *Pirates of the West Indies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), i.

58. Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 19; Kris Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500–1750* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 183.

59. G. Earl Sanders, “Counter-Contraband in Spanish America: Handicaps of the Governors in the Indies,” *Americas* 34 (July 1977): 59–80. *Guardacostas* were often supplied through foreign traders. Grahm, *Political Economy of Smuggling*, 187. On the relationship between piracy, privateering, and sovereignty, see Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112–20, 150. Benton notes that while privateering was legally distinct, the British labeled this activity as piracy often, but inconsistently.

60. February 3, 1724. Ind. 2769, Leg. 8, f. 204, AGI. These accusations were backed up by British sources, including Burnet and Plowes. Studer, *La trata de negros*, 198.

61. To the King’s most excellent majesty the humble address of the Council and Assembly of Jamaica. August 9, 1718. CO 137/13/61, TNA.

62. *State of the Island of Jamaica*, 8.

63. *Jamaica Courant*, June 20, 1722.

64. Attempts to dissuade piracy through the example of morally charged executions

were made particularly in New England. Daniel E. Williams, “Puritans and Pirates: A Confrontation between Cotton Mather and William Fly in 1726,” *Early American Literature* 22, 3 (1987): 233–51; on pirate trials, see especially Mark Hanna, “The Pirate Nest: The Impact of Piracy on Newport, Rhode Island and Charles Town, South Carolina, 1670–1740” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2008), 198–282. Benton notes that the many pirate trials of the 1720s corresponded to an increase in global British naval power: Benton, *Search for Sovereignty*, 149. Some of the most famous pirates, such as Captain William Kidd, were tried in the metropole. Robert C. Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War Against the Pirates* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), esp. 206–27.

65. *The Tryals of Captain John Rackam, and Other Pirates* (Jamaica: Robert Baldwin, 1721).

66. *Ibid.*, 14.

67. While Rackam and his crew were some of the more colorful pirates and may have happily flouted international law, the research of Lauren Benton and others suggests that pirates often attempted to stay within the letter of the law in order to avoid prosecution and hanging. Benton, “Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47 (October 2005): 707.

68. *The Tryals of Captain John Rackam*, 15. Other European nations also participated in deceptive flag-raising, as practitioners and as the nations represented. For instance, during his voyage George Shelvocke raised a French flag when about to be boarded by a Spanish officer attempting to determine whether his ship was illegally present off the coast of Chile. Shelvocke, *A Voyage Round the World*, 82.

69. *Tryals*, 15.

70. The whole proceedings of Captain Dennis’s Expedition to the Governor of the Havana; being a memorial, or journal of what occurrences happened during his stay there. January 26, 1718. CO 137/13/139, TNA.

71. For an example of this sort of dispute, see “Panama Año de 1714 Antonio de Echevers y Subiza, Presidente de la Real Audiencia de Guatemala con Henrique Harris Capitan de una Balandra Ing.a apresada por dho Echeverz sobre que se declarase por legitima de dha presa,” *Escribania* 485B, AGI.

72. Charles Johnson, *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* (London: Ch. Rivington, 1724), 43.

73. *Ibid.*, 55. On the similarities between piracy and legal activities, see Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, 113–14.

74. Woodes Rogers, *A Cruising Voyage Round the World*, ed. Percy G. Adams (New York: Dover, 1970), 181.

75. Translation of the Marquis de Grimaldo’s Letter to His Excellency Mr. Stanhope, Sr. Idelfonso June 22, 1725. Add. Mss. 25562, f. 207–18, BL.

76. Dolores G. Molleda, “El contrabando inglés en América: Correspondencia inédita de la factoría de Buenos Aires,” *Hispania* 10, 39 (April/June 1950): 365.

77. Savelle, *Empires to Nations*, 124; Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry*, 78.

78. Mathew Kent to Mr. Rigby at Paris, October 3, 1728. Add. Mss. 25562, f. 113, BL.
79. Court of Directors, September 15, 1721. Add. Mss. 25500, f. 104, BL.
80. Court of Directors to the King, October 12, 1726. Add. Mss. 25560, f. 51, BL; Court of Directors, November 25, 1726. Add 32781, f. 101v, BL.
81. South Sea Company, *Abstract of the Charter of the Governour and Company of Merchants of Great Britain, trading to the South-Seas* (London: 1711), 6.
82. Complaints against Swartz and Johnson, August 9, 1728. Add. Mss. 25552, f. 32–33, BL; A Considerable Stockholder, *Enquiry into the Misconduct and Frauds Committed by Several of the Factors, Super-Cargoes, and others, Employed by the Late and Present Directors of the South-Sea Company* (London: R. Walker, 1736), 49.
83. Translation of an extract of the Spanish instructions that was transmitted to Mr. Stanhope's & Mr. Walpole's very secret letter of July 2/13, 1728. SP 78/188/205, TNA.
84. *Ibid.*, f. 206.
85. *British Journal* (London) Friday, January 14, 1726, 2; Walker, *Spanish Politics*, 155.
86. Colonel Spotswood to Lord Townsend, 1727. In obedience to your Lordships commands therein offer my notions as to what may be done against the Spaniards in the West Indies. Add. Mss. 32694, f. 3, BL.
87. On these *represalias* see, for instance, Contaduria 1880, Contaduria 1881A, AGI.
88. Letter from John Burnet to Hans Sloane. Jamaica, February 4, 1728. Sloane Mss. 4050, f. 54, BL.
89. Speech of the Honourable John Ayscough Esq; President, at the meeting of the Assembly the 1st of March, 1726, *Jamaica Courant*. March 22, 1726.
90. Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War*, 211.
91. *The Treaty of Peace, Union, Friendship, and Mutual Defence, Between the Crowns of Great-Britain, France, and Spain, Concluded at Seville on the 9th of November, N.S. 1729*, 19–20.
92. Jean O. McLachlan, *Trade and Peace in Old Spain: 1667–1750: A Study of the Influence of Commerce on Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 87.
93. Robert Walpole, *Observations upon the treaty between the crowns of Great-Britain, France, and Spain, Concluded at Seville on the ninth of November, 1729* (London: J. Roberts, 1729), 17–18.
94. Walpole, *Observations upon the treaty*, 20–21.
95. A more complete analysis of Burnet's decision to ally with the Spanish can be found in Brown, "The South Sea Company and Contraband Trade," 670; Victoria Gardner Sorsby, "British Trade with Spanish America Under the Asiento, 1713–1740" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1975), 157.
96. On Plowes's and Burnet's reports to the Spanish, see in particular Brown, "The South Sea Company and Contraband Trade," 677–78; Studer, *La trata de negros*, 196–99; Molleda, "El contrabando inglés," 336–69; Jorge Palacios Preciado, *La trata de negros por Cartagena de Indias* (Tunja: Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de

Colombia, 1973), 183–84; Leslie B. Rout, *The African Experience in Spanish America, 1502 to the Present Day* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 54–56; Sorsby, “British Trade,” 157.

97. Rout, *African Experience*, 54; Preciado, *La trata de negros*, 185; Studer, *La trata de negros*, 197.

98. Ibid., 668–77; Studer, *El trata de negros*, 197–99; Molleda, “El contrabando inglés,” 351–53.

99. Molleda, “El contrabando inglés,” 366.

100. Sorsby, “British Trade,” 158–59.

101. See in particular Sloane Mss. 4055, f. 103, 129, 214, 307; Sloane Mss. 4054 f. 266, 314; Sloane Mss. 4026 f. 320; and Sloane Mss. 4058 f. 80, 82, BL.

Chapter 3. “Unjust Depredations” and Growing Tensions, 1729–1738

1. The simultaneous possibility of profit and danger had long existed in one form or another in areas where Spanish and English American interests overlapped. See in particular Kristen Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 65–91.

2. Sobre que el Governador de la Havana haga se restitua al Factor del Asiento de Inglaterra una Negra Conga llamada Isabel. December 7, 1731. Ind. 2769, Leg. 9, f. 116v–119r, AGI.

3. Another very similar case occurred three years later, with a Mina slave woman named Ana Maria. Sobre que al factor de la Compania del Assiento de Inglaterra de la Havana se le restitua una Negra llamada Ana Maria de Casta Mina. February 22, 1734. Ind. 2769, Leg. 9, f. 217v–219r, AGI.

4. Josep M. Fradera and Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Slavery and Antislavery in Spain's Atlantic Empire* (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 29.

5. Geoffrey J. Walker, *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade, 1700–1789* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 131.

6. On general smuggling in the West Indies, see Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997); Christian Koot, *Empire at the Periphery: British Colonists, Anglo-Dutch Trade, and the Development of the British Atlantic, 1621–1713* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); George H. Nelson, “Contraband Trade Under the Asiento, 1730–1739,” *American Historical Review* 5 (October 1945): 55–67; Linda M. Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

7. Grahn, *Political Economy of Smuggling*, 127.

8. Shinsuke Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War in the Early Eighteenth Century: Silver, Seapower, and the Atlantic* (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell, 2013), 232.

9. Court of Directors to Duke of Newcastle, 6 July 1733, Add. Mss. 32,781, f. 307, BL.

This claim is supported by Colin Palmer's research on the profitability and extent of the slave trade. Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700–1739* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

10. *Considerations on the American Trade, Before and Since the Establishment of the South-Sea Company* (London: J. Roberts, 1739), 10.

11. John Merewether to Peter Burrell, Jamaica, September 5, 1736. Shelburne Collection, v. 44, f. 875–76, CL.

12. *Considerations on the American Trade*, 15–16.

13. H.H. to Hon Louell Lea Comp. Panama, December 14, 1737, Shelburne Collection, 44, f. 533, CL.

14. On the importance of contraband to political economies, see Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 103; Grahn, *Political Economy of Smuggling*. On Buenos Aires, see Elena F. S. Studer, *La trata de negros en el Río de la Plata durante el siglo XVIII* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1958), 233. The colonists eagerly accepted the company's contraband goods: Dolores G. Molleda, "El contrabando inglés en América: Correspondencia inédita de la factoría de Buenos Aires," *Hispania* 10, 39 (April/June, 1950): 349.

15. *An Address to the Proprietors of the South-Sea Capital. Containing a Discovery of the Illicit Trade, carry'd on in the West-Indies; and shewing the great Detriment thereof to the Publick; and the Necessity of Discouraging it with Rigour, notwithstanding the Pains taken to gloss it over; and to Recommend your cautious and tender Resentments. By a Proprietor of the said Company* (London: Stephen Austen, 1732), 6.

16. *An Address to the Proprietors of the South-Sea Capital*, 6–7.

17. The Case of the South Sea Company's Agents at Barbados and their Factor at the Carracas. Shelburne Collection 43, f. 377, CL.

18. *An Address to the Proprietors of the South-Sea Capital*, 11–14.

19. Letter of Benjamin Keene, October 27, 1732. Add. Mss. 32779, f. 15, BL.

20. Letter from the South Sea Company to Benjamin Keene, May 15, 1730. Add. Mss. 32768, f. 50, BL.

21. In part, this willingness to accept direct contraband trade was the result of the much lower prices paid for goods not coming through Spain itself. Walker, *Spanish Politics*, 13.

22. For an additional similar case, see Esc. 60A, Leg. 25, Plietos de Havana, no. 1, 1733, AGI.

23. Letter from the South Sea Company to Benjamin Keene, May 15, 1730. Add. Mss. 32768, f. 50, BL.

24. *His Catholick Majesty's Manifesto, Justifying his Conduct in relation to the late Convention with his reasons for not paying the ninety-five Thousand Pounds* (London: Robert Amey, 1739), 42–43.

25. *His Catholick Majesty's Manifesto*, 42–43.

26. Silvia Espelt Bombín, "Trade Control, Law and Flexibility: Merchants and

Crown Interests in Panama, 1700–1750,” in *Early Bourbon Spanish America: Politics and Society in a Forgotten Era (1700–1759)*, ed. Francisco A. Eissa-Barroso and Ainara Vásquez Varela (Boston: Brill, 2013), 135.

27. *West Indian Trade: Extension Treaty (1667) with Spain to the West Indies, 1739*. MS 450, NLJ.

28. *His Catholic Majesty's Conduct Compared with that of His Britannick Majesty* (London: T. Cooper, 1739), 7.

29. Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 150.

30. On the “golden age of piracy,” see in particular Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon, 2004), 8.

31. Several scholars have made the point that pirates operated not only in opposition to established governments, but sometimes in support of government power. This seems to have been the case with the *guardacostas* and British privateers operating at this time. See in particular Erin Mackie, “Welcome the Outlaw: Pirates, Maroons, and Caribbean Countercultures,” *Cultural Critique* 59 (Winter 2005): 35; Benton, *Search for Sovereignty*, 113.

32. Letter from the Duke of Newcastle to Benjamin Keene, March 24, 1729/30. SP 94/101, n.f., TNA.

33. Letter from the duke of Newcastle to Benjamin Keene, January 13, 1736/7. Add. Mss. 32794, f. 26, BL.

34. An account of the murder of Captain Thomas Weir from an Inhabitant of Santa Martha, 1736. Add. Mss. 32794, f. 36, BL.

35. Norwich Gazette vol. 24, October 10 to October 17, 1730. Letter from Jamaica, July 25, 1730. MS 436, NLJ.

36. Letter from Shadrack Bastie to Sir John Eyles Bart. La Vera Cruz, June 29, 1732. Add. Mss. 32779, f. 41, BL.

37. Copy of Gov. of Jamaica's Letter to the Gov. of St. Iago de Cuba, March 18, 1732/3. Add. Mss. 32781, f. 281, BL.

38. New Providence. Deposition of Lane Whitehall, September 12, 1729. ADM 1/231/25, TNA.

39. Letter from Jonathan Dennis and Leonard Cocke to Benjamin Keene, Santiago de Cuba, August 10, 1731. Add. Mss. 32775, f. 114, BL.

40. *Ibid.*, f. 115.

41. Letter from Charles Stewart at Jamaica. April 6, 1732. ADM 1/123/398, TNA.

42. June 17, 1731, SP 94/101, n.f., TNA.

43. The truth of Jenkins's claims has been debated. William Laird Clowes, Clements Robert Markham, et al. *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present*, vol. 3 (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1898), 51.

44. Ernest G. Hildner, “The Role of the South Sea Company in the Diplomacy Leading to the War of Jenkins' Ear, 1729–1739,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 18:3 (August 1938): 323.

45. Edward W. Lawson, "What Became of the Man Who Cut Off Jenkins' Ear?" *Florida Historical Quarterly* 37, 1 (July 1958): 33–41; J. K. Laughton, "Jenkins' Ear," *English Historical Review* 4:16 (October 1889): 748–79.

46. Cádiz February 1, 1737. Add. Mss. 32,797, f. 148, BL.

47. La Guira July 22, 1736. No names given. Shelburne Collection, vol. 44, f. 667, CL.

48. Burnet mentions that he has not received a shipment of books because it is being examined by the Inquisition. Letter from John Burnet to Hans Sloane, Cartagena, October 6, 1725. Sloane Mss. 4048, f. 70, BL. Likely for both religious and financial reasons, the Spanish officials were sometimes quite strict about exactly where British subjects could live and travel. In 1724 the king sent orders to officials in New Spain reminding them that factors were only allowed to live in Veracruz, not in Mexico. December 3, 1724. Ind. 2769, Leg. 8, f. 261v–262r, AGI.

49. Court of Directors of the South Sea Company to the Duke of Newcastle. June 17, 1725. Add. Mss. 25556, f. 69, BL. The Spanish were concerned both about the religion and the quality and habits of the slaves brought from British colonies rather than directly from the African coast. October 20, 1724. Ind. 2769, f. 253, AGI.

50. Court of Directors of the South Sea Company to the Duke of Newcastle. June 17, 1725. Add. Mss. 25556, f. 70, BL. The company complained on numerous occasions of the difficulty of supplying the Spanish colonies with sufficient slaves if they could not keep slaves at Jamaica to make up for mortality on the voyage from Africa to the West Indies. Remarks on the Method of Making up the Acct of the Negroe Trade. No date. Shelburne Collection 43, f. 507, CL.

51. Letter from the Court of Directors to Lord Carteret, Principal Secretary of State, South Sea House August 11, 1721. Add. Mss. 25556, f. 14, BL.

52. Inquisición 791, f. 186–89; see also Inquisición 791, f. 190–93 and f. 197–200; Inquisición 1241, f. 155–65; Inquisición 789, f. 49–52, AGN.

53. Inquisición 848 v. 2, f. 398–416, AGN.

54. *The South-Sea Kidnapper. Address'd in a Letter to the Court of Directors of the South-Sea Company. In Answer to the last paragraph of an Advertisement inserted in the Daily-Post-Boy, the 2d of August, and dated from the South-Sea House the 30th of July. By an Englishman* (London: A. Moore, 1730), 4.

55. *Ibid.*, 5.

56. Indeed, Irish subjects had been circulating in and periodically influential to the Spanish Americas since at least the seventeenth century, as demonstrated by the case of Don Guillén Lombardo de Guzmán. Ryan Dominic Crewe, "Brave New Spain: An Irishman's Independence Plot in Seventeenth-Century Mexico," *Past and Present* 207 (May 2010): 53–87. See also Óscar Recio Morales, *Ireland and the Spanish Empire, 1600–1825* (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2010); Hilary McD. Beckles, "A 'riotous and unruly lot': Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1644–1713," *William and Mary Quarterly* 47 (October 1990): 503–22.

57. Eamonn O Ciardha, *Ireland and the Jacobite Cause, 1685–1766: A Fatal Attachment* (Portland: Four Courts, 2002), 30, 136.

58. Letter from the Duke of Newcastle to Benjamin Keene, February 24, 1735. Add. Mss. 32787, f. 46, BL.

59. James Houstoun, *Dr. Houstoun's Memoirs of His Own Life-Time* (London: Jacob Bickerstaff, 1747), 347.

60. Letter from Rd. Hopkins to Newcastle. February 21, 1734/5. Add. Mss. 32787, f. 58, BL.

61. At a Court of Directors, November 25, 1737. Add. Mss. 25509, f. 51, BL.

62. Petition to English King from Directors of SSC. April 3, 1735. Add. Mss. 32787, f. 58, BL.

63. Samuel Collit's Answer to Patiño's Complaint. Add. Mss. 32785, f. 456–57, BL.

64. Copy of a letter from Jamaica to a merchant in London, extract. Jamaica, September 21, 1730. Add. Mss. 12431, f. 31, BL.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Considerable Stock-Holder, *Enquiry into the Misconduct and Frauds Committed by Several of the Factors, Supercargoes and Others, Employed by the Late and Present Directors of the South-Sea Company* (London: R. Walker, 1735), 53.

68. South Sea Company Court of Directors to Benjamin Keene, London, July 4, 1735. Add. Mss. 32788, f. 172, BL.

69. This was the rationale for not allowing slaves to be brought first into the British colonies. Letter from the Court of Directors of the South Sea Company to the Duke of Newcastle. London June 17, 1725. Add. Mss. 25556, f. 69, BL.

70. Court of Directors to Mr. Farril at Havana, June 5, 1718. Add. Mss. 25563, f. 172–172v, BL.

71. Letter from the Board of the South Sea Company to His Excellency Mr. Keene, London, July 4, 1735. Add. Mss. 32788, f. 174, BL. Mentions of this case also appear in *cedulas* from the Spanish crown asking for information on the practices and standards operating in the area in response to the company's complaints in Ind. 2769, Leg. 9, f. 276v–278r, AGI.

72. La Junta del Asiento de Negros, January 10, 1735, Ind. 2786, n.f., AGI.

73. Demanda puesta por algunos negros que hicieron fuga de la isla de Jamaica a la de Cuba . . . Esc. 96b, Quaderno 12, AGI. For similar cases of potential slaves from one empire ending up in another, see David Barry Gaspar, "Subjects to the King of Portugal: Captivity and Repatriation in the Atlantic Slave Trade (Antigua, 1724)," in *The Creation of the British Atlantic World*, ed. Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), esp. 107–14; Block, *Ordinary Lives*, 19–62.

74. Orlando Patterson, "Slavery and Slave Revolts: A Sociohistorical Analysis of the First Maroon War, 1665–1740," in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Richard Price, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 247.

75. His Excellency's Speech to the Assembly the 17th of June, 1730, *Jamaica Courant*, June 24, 1730.

76. Letter from Edward Trelawny to the Duke of Newcastle, London, June 30, 1737. CO 137/56/74, TNA.

77. *Ibid.*, f. 75.

78. R. C. Dallas, *The History of the Maroons, From their Origins to the Establishment of their Chief Tribe at Sierra Leone: Including the Expedition to Cuba, for the Purposes of Procuring Spanish Chasseurs; and the State of the Island of Jamaica for the last Ten Years: with a Succinct History of the Island previous to that period* (London: A. Strahan, 1893), 35.

79. Captain Christopher Allen, This ALS and Journals to May. Gen. Robert Hunter, Governor re: Molly's Town, March 1731–1732. MS 440, NAJ.

80. January 3, 1731, CO 137/20/53. n.d. f. 57, TNA.

81. Governor Robert Hunter His Speech to the Assembly, April 5, 1732. MS 439, NLJ.

82. Letter from Coll Cornwallis to Lord Cornwallis Port Royal March 15, 1730/1. CO 137/19/1/27, TNA.

83. *Ibid.* On the dangerous climate in Jamaica, especially during the English conquest of the island, see in particular J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 97–105.

84. Jose L. Franco, “Maroons and Slave Rebellions in the Spanish Territories,” in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Richard Price, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 41.

85. Letter from Governor Hunter to Board, July 4, 1730. CO 137/18/78, TNA.

86. Deposition of Captain William Quarrell, June 23, 1730. CO 137/18/100, TNA. Orlando Patterson notes that rumors of this were widespread: Patterson, “Slavery and Slave Revolts,” 264. For another suggestion that Cubans would unite with the Maroon communities, see Add. Mss. 12419, f. 68, BL.

87. Deposition of John Tello, June 18, 1730. CO 137/18/98, TNA.

88. Governor Hunter to Duke of Newcastle, Jamaica, January 23, 1731. CO 137/52/299–309, TNA.

89. Jos Maxwell, Secry, November 21, 1730. CO 137/19/1/43, TNA.

90. Lieutenant Governor Thomas Broughton to Duke of Newcastle. Charleston, February 6, 1737. CO 5/388/137, TNA.

91. Edward Long reports that the Maroon communities were also weary of the long war. Long, *The History of Jamaica* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 2: 344.

92. Anon. *Narrative of the Maroons*, n.d. in Papers Relating to Jamaica [kept by Edward Long as notes toward his book]. Add. Mss. 12431, f. 69–75, BL.

93. Address by the Merchants of Kingston to the President. Add. Mss. 12418, f. 307v, BL.

94. Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 163; Peter Charles Hoffer, *Cry Liberty: The Great Stono River Slave Rebellion of 1739* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), xii.

95. Declaration of Sommerset Master and Wm Benson, December 28, 1730. Add.

Mss. 32773, f. 93–4, BL. These soldiers were present on Jamaica as part of the military action against the Maroon communities.

96. Letter from Leonard Cocke to Commodore Dent, January 8, 1736/7. Add. Mss. 32794, f. 250, BL. For more on Wall, see John Tate Lanning, “Don Miguel Wall and the Spanish Attempt Against the Existence of Carolina and Georgia,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 10:3 (July 1933): 186–213; Lanning, *The Diplomatic History of Georgia: A Study of the Epoch of Jenkins’ Ear* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936); Aileen Moore Topping, “‘A Free Facetious Gentleman,’ Jean Savy, Double Agent?” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 56, 3 (January 1978): 261–79.

97. Copy of the memorial of the South Sea Company to His Grace the Duke of Newcastle March 16, 1731/2. Add. Mss. 32776, f. 218, BL.

98. October 27, 1731. Shelburne Collection 44, f. 571, CL.

99. Copy of the memorial of the South Sea Company to His Grace the Duke of Newcastle, March 16, 1732. Add. Mss. 32776, f. 219, BL.

100. “The subgovernor acquainted the court with his intentions to quit that station; that he had put into writing what he thought proper to say upon this occasion, which he read, and is as follows.” December 20, 1732. Add. Mss. 25505, f. 202, BL.

101. Address from the South Sea Company to the King, London, May 15, 1735. Rd Hopkins, Sub Governor, Jn Bristowe. Add. Mss. 32787, f. 288–91, BL.

102. Proposals for the Royal Assiento Company Carrying on a Trade to the Windward Coast of the North Seas of America. Shelburne Collection, v. 43, unnumbered folio, no date, CL.

103. Letter from W. Smith to Benjamin Keene, September 14, 1738. Add. Mss. 32799, f. 17, BL.

104. Ibid. Additional orders were sent to the officials at Panama instructing them that they were not to prevent Dennis from performing his duties as an employee of the Company. Letter to Don Dionoso Munoz de la Vega, May 24, 1738, Panama 364, n.f., AGI.

105. Letter from Edward Manning to Peter Burrell, Jamaica June 13, 1738, Shelburne Collection, 44, f. 778, CL.

106. Dennis complains of this problem in: Jonathan Dennys to Peter Burrell, Jamaica, November 24, 1738, Shelburne Collection, v. 44, f. 719–20, CL. On the Spanish side, see especially Panama 364, n.f. Panama, May 24, 1739, and Portobello June 1, 1739, AGI.

107. Letter from Jonathan Dennis to Peter Burrell, Panama, February 15, 1739. Shelburne Collection, 44, f. 463, CL.

108. Letter from Francis Humphreys, South Sea Company Factor at the Havana, to Anthony Weltden, Portobello September 28, 1739, CO 23/14/330, TNA.

Chapter 4. The End of the British Asiento, 1739–1748

1. James Houstoun, *Dr. Houstoun’s Memoirs of His Own Life-Time* (London: Jacob Bickerstaff, 1747), 20. Houstoun’s memoirs were collected and published by Bickerstaff

along with a short appendix of Houstoun's correspondence. Houstoun republished much of the same material in *Memoirs of the Life and Travels of James Houstoun, M.D.* (London: J. Robinson, 1747) and *The Works of James Houstoun, M.D. Containing Memoirs of His Life and Travels in Asia, Africa, America, and Most Parts of Europe* (London: S. Bladon, 1753). Houstoun admits that on his arrival in Paris, where he was to study in the Salle des Accouchments of the famous Hôtel-Dieu, he "lived two or three months . . . without having the least thought of business, and went into all the Gayeties of the town." Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 64. In addition to the works listed above, Houstoun published his *True and Impartial Account of the Rise and Progress of the South Sea Company Wherein the Assiento Contract is Particularly Considered* (London: T. Cooper, 1743).

2. James Brydges to Sir John Eyles Bart, January 17, 1724/1725. Huntington Library, Stowe Papers 57, vol. 25, f. 155. Particular thanks to Lindsay O'Neill for altering me to this source.

3. Larry Stewart, "The Edge of Utility: Slaves and Smallpox in the Early Eighteenth Century," *Medical History* 29 (January 1985): 62–66. Houstoun addressed the situation on the coast of Guinea and made recommendations for the Royal African Company soon after moving to Cartagena, in his *Some new and accurate observations geographical, natural, and historical* (London: J. Peele, 1725).

4. Houstoun's memoirs fall into the genre of travel writing that British readers consumed voraciously in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Jon S. Lawry suggests that Houstoun's writings share the same category as *Gulliver's Travels*, questioning the truth of his story.

Houstoun's assertions are backed up at several points by the official records of the South Sea Company. Lawry, "Dr. Lemuel Gulliver and 'The Thing Which Was Not,'" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 67 (April 1968): 218.

5. Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 43.

6. Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 40. Historian Colin Kidd's investigation of British patriotism suggests that many Scottish individuals simultaneously embraced the English because of the economic opportunities that alliance offered, while maintaining a core "emotional identification" with their Scottish roots. Kidd, "North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms," *Historical Journal* 39 (June 1996): 363.

7. Douglas Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750–1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 112–14.

8. Houstoun, *Works*, 34.

9. Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 23.

10. *Ibid.*, 203.

11. *Ibid.*, 15, 20, 40, 147.

12. The court of directors made Houstoun surgeon at Cartagena in March 1724, and he sailed shortly thereafter. Add. Mss. 25564, f. 101, BL.

13. Houstoun, *Works*, 156–58.

14. David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 193–94. In his chapter addressing the Royal African Company, Hancock suggests that the interactions between British factors and their employees in Africa were unusually harmonious, indicating again the influence of trade and profit in overcoming international and racial dissimilarity. On the employees and activities of the Royal African Company, see also K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 2nd ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672–1752* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

15. See especially Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992).

16. Houston, *Memoirs*, 159.

17. *Ibid.*, 43.

18. *Ibid.*, 173–74.

19. Houston, *Works*, 157.

20. Houston, *Memoirs*, 159.

21. *Ibid.*, 276.

22. Brown's fellow factors complained of him at great length in a number of letters contained in the Letters from James Savill, Francis Humphreys, and Robert Hilton to Peter Burnet, April 27, 1730 to March 25, 1731, Shelburne Collection, 44, f. 413–38, CL. See also Victoria Gardner Sorsby, "British Trade with Spanish America Under the Asiento, 1713–1740" (Ph.D. dissertation, University College, London, 1975), 184.

23. Letter from Francis Humphreys to John Eyles, Buenos Aires, March 15, 1731. Shelburne Collection, 44, f. 429, CL.

24. Committee of Correspondence. Add. Mss. 25551, f. 81f., BL.

25. Jean McLachlan, *Trade and Peace in Old Spain: 1667–1750: A Study of the Influence of Commerce on Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 129.

26. Houston, *Memoirs*, 157–58.

27. *Ibid.*, 274.

28. Houston, *Some Observations*, 33–34.

29. Houston, *Memoirs*, 163–64; Cuenta de la segunda represalia, Contaduría 266, N.F. AGI; Add. Mss. 33032, f. 43, BL.

30. Ruth Bourne, "The Wooden World Dissected," *Pacific Historical Review* (September 1945), 331; Geoffrey J. Walker, *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade, 1700–1789* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 155; Shinsuke Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War in the Early Eighteenth Century: Silver, Seapower, and the Atlantic* (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell, 2013), 232.

31. Houstoun, *Works*, 167–78., 167. It is possible, even likely, that this Irish translator was Catholic.

32. Houstoun, *Works*.

33. Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 168.

34. Houstoun, *Works*, 169–70.

35. On cosmopolitanism among merchants, see especially Alison Games, *Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

36. Letter from James Houstoun to Sir H. Sloane November 12, 1730. In this letter Houstoun also includes astronomical data recorded in South America by other observers, indicating contact with a wider scientific community in the Americas and Europe. Sloane Mss. 4051, f. 85, BL.

37. Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 194–95.

38. Houstoun, *Works*, 172.

39. June 17, 1729. Add. Mss. 25552, f. 64v, BL.

40. September 4, 1733. Add. Mss. 25554, f. 34v, BL. Two years later, Ord would cause a stir in Cartagena, where he would be accused of involvement in smuggling. AGI, Santa Fe 1167, n.f., 1735.

41. Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 198; Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview 1997), 132.

42. Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 191.

43. On the diplomatic history of the war, see in particular Philip Woodfine, *Britannia's Glories: The Walpole Ministry and the 1739 War with Spain* (Rochester: Boydell, 1998).

44. On the role of public opinion and the South Sea Company in the war, see especially Kathleen Wilson, "Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon," *Past and Present* 121 (November 1988): 74–109.

45. Errnest G. Hildner, Jr., "The Role of the South Sea Company in the Diplomacy Leading to the War of Jenkins' Ear, 1729–1739," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 18:3 (August 1938), 323; John Lynch, *Bourbon Spain, 1700–1808* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), 136–39.

46. On arguments about the possibility of reopening the *asiento*, see in particular McLachlan, *Trade and Peace in Old Spain*, 122–45.

47. *Considerations on the American Trade before and since the Establishment of the South Sea Company* (London: J. Roberts, 1739), 9. The claim about the losses sustained by previous *asientists* cannot be entirely confirmed, though some, like Nicolas Porcio, certainly experienced significant losses during their trade. Helen Paul's recent investigations into the finances of the South Sea Company suggest that there was a clear opportunity for profit in the trade available to the company. Helen J. Paul, *The South Sea Bubble: an Economic History of Its Origins and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

48. Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700–1739* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 145–55.

49. *Considerations on the American Trade*, 24.

50. The importance of the press in influencing the push toward war did not escape eighteenth-century Britons. Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714–1783* (New York: Allen Lane, 2007), 251, 275.

51. Kathleen Wilson, “Empire, Trade and Popular Politics,” 78. Wilson notes that there were at least four dozen petitions and memorials sent to the British government between March 1738 and March 1739 regarding the situation in the Americas. Indeed, merchants continued to complain about the depredations of the 1720s through the final years of the war. Sydney Papers, Great Britain, Merchants, Sufferers by Spanish Depredations before June 2, 1721. Cy to Great Britain, House of Commons, 1746, CL.

52. *The Merchant’s Complaint Against Spain* (London: W. Lloyd, 1738), 3.

53. Simms notes that the war with Spain was uniquely colonial and commercial for eighteenth-century Britain. Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat*, 273. Richard Pares also observes that in a conflict between Britain and Spain, the British could be assured of their relative military superiority in the Americas, while a war within Europe would be more difficult to prosecute: Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies: 1739–1763* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1963), 65.

54. Micaiah Towgood, *Spanish Cruelty and Injustice a Justifiable Plea for a Vigorous War with Spain* (London: R. Hett, 1741), 16.

55. Francis L. Berkeley, “The War of Jenkins’ Ear,” in *The Old Dominion: Essays for Thomas Perkins Abernathy*, ed. Darrett R. Rutman (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1964), 41–61.

56. Jack Greene, *Evaluating Empire and Confronting Colonialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), ix.

57. *Reasons for a War against Spain. In a Letter from a Merchant of London Trading to America, to a Member of the House of Commons. With A Plan of Operations* (London: J. Wilford, 1736), 17.

58. Lynch, *Bourbon Spain*, 127–29.

59. *A Reply to a Pamphlet intituled, Popular Prejudices against the Convention and Treaty with Spain, Examind and Answered in a Letter to a Member of Parliament* (London: T. Cooper, 1739), 25. The author refers here to Carolina and Georgia, the two colonies most hotly disputed at the time.

60. *Reasons for a War Against Spain*, 28.

61. *Ministerial Prejudices in favour of the Convention, Examind and Answer’d* (London: T. Cooper, 1739), 11.

62. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

63. *The British Sailor’s Discovery: or the Spanish Pretensions Confuted* (London: T. Cooper, 1739), 36.

64. *Ibid.*, 70–71.

65. On published arguments for war, see Wilson, “Empire, Trade and Popular Politics,” 98–100.

66. *The Merchant’s Complaint*, 32.

67. Trelawny to Newcastle, Jamaica, February 1, 1739/1740. CO 137/56/284, TNA.

68. *His Catholick Majesty's Conduct Compared with that of His Britannick Majesty* (London: T. Cooper, 1739), 13.

69. *Ibid.*, 11.

70. *A Reply to a Pamphlet Intituled, Popular Prejudices against the Convention and Treaty with Spain, Examind and Answered* (London: T. Cooper, 1739), 7.

71. *A State of the Rise and Progress of the Disputes with Spain* (London: H. Goreham, 1740), 16.

72. *A review of All that hath Pass'd between the Courts of Great Britain and Spain, Relating to Our Trade and Navigation, From the Year 1721, to the Present Convention; with some Particular Observations upon it* (London: H. Goreham, 1739), 25.

73. *State of the Rise and Progress*, 75.

74. *The Spanish Merchant's Address to all Candid and Impartial Englishmen* (London: J. Roberts, 1736), 13.

75. David J. Weber, "Conflicts and Accommodations: Hispanic and Anglo-American Borders in Historical Perspective, 1670–1853," *Journal of the Southwest* 39 (Spring 1997): 4. Manuscripts produced by the British make the connection between establishing a colony in the Carolinas and the dangers from other European nations clear. One writer argued that "had South Carolina faln into the hands of either of the French or Spaniards . . . the Consequence would have been very fatal not only to all the settlements in North America, but also to the British navigation to the sugar islands." Reasons for the Crown to Purchase the Carolinas. Sydney Papers. 1729, CL.

76. *State of the Rise and Progress*, 50.

77. *Reply to a Pamphlet*, 25. Pagden notes that the push for universal monarchy had fallen away in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though the complaints of Spain and Britain demonstrate a continued fear of this kind of ambition into the mid-eighteenth century. Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France 1500–1800* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 29–62.

78. *Peace and No Peace: or an Enquiry whether the late Convention with Spain will be more advantageous to Great Britain than the Treaty of Seville. With a postscript upon the King of Spain's Protest, which is not printed with the Convention* (London: R. Chissen, 1739), 10.

79. In some ways, Spain was at a disadvantage. Even in the seventeenth century a declining population and inability to completely control commerce in the wider empire made it less promising than England, though the Bourbon reforms aimed to correct some of the major structural problems the Spanish faced. J. Leitch Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in North America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 47.

80. On the long history of British interest in Spanish American lands, see Glyndwr Williams, "'The Inexhaustible Fountain of Gold': English Projects and Ventures in the South Seas, 1670–1750," in *Perspectives of Empire*, ed. John E. Flint and Glyndwr Williams (London: Longman, 1973), 27–53.

81. Abstracts of several schemes under consideration, October 1739. Add. Mss. 32694, f. 60–1, BL.

82. On Spanish offers of freedom to British slaves, see in particular Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 29–61.

83. Houstoun, *Works*, 15–19.

84. Mr. Knight's Letter to the Duke of Newcastle November 20, 1739. Add. Mss. 32694, f. 9–10, BL.

85. CL, Shelburne Collection, v. 43, f. 433–34. No sender, no date. Paul Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 272–80.

86. *A Proposal for Humbling Spain* (London: J. Roberts, 1740), 19.

87. David Campbell's Opinion Re: Chief Prospective sites of attack in the Spanish Indies during Present war. January 7, 1741. MS 458, f. 5, NLJ. Campbell provides extensive information on the Spanish holdings in the New World, including the nature and location of fortifications, the economic potential of various areas, and the habits and strategic usefulness of the native peoples.

88. John Hart to Townsend, May 8, 1729. Add. Mss. 32694, f. 37, BL.

89. Indeed, in 1762 Great Britain was able to strike a significant blow against the Spanish empire by seizing Havana. For more on the occupation of Havana, see Elena Schneider, "The Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Cuba" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2011).

90. Fayer Hall, *The Importance of the British Plantations in America to this Kingdom* (London: J. Peele, 1731), 58.

91. "Remarkable Occurances from the year 1745 to 1748, during the far greater part of which time I was a prisoner in the hands of the French and Spaniards: transcribed from my private notes in Rhode Island, anno 1748." Codex Eng 120, f. 237–8, JCBL.

92. Pares, *War and Trade*, 52.

93. Hildner, *Role of the South Sea Company*, 323–30.

94. *His Catholick Majesty's Manifesto, Justifying his Conduct in relation to the late Convention with his reasons for not paying the ninety-five Thousand Pounds* (London: Robert Amey, 1739), 6–7.

95. *Ibid.*, 11, 17.

96. *Ibid.*, 53.

97. *His Majesty's Declaration of War against the King of Spain, October 19, 1739* (London: John Baskett, 1739); Greene, *Evaluating Empire*, 37.

98. On the conduct of the war, politically and militarily, see Philip Woodfine, *Britannia's Glories: The Walpole Ministry and the 1739 War with Spain* (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell and Brewer, 1998); Larry E. Ivers, *British Drums on the Southern Frontier: The Military Colonization of Georgia, 1733–1749* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974); Pares, *War and Trade*; Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry*.

99. Wilson, "Empire, Trade and Popular Politics," 80.

100. Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry*, 89. Oglesby notes that attacks were not initially launched against Cuba because of its dangerous proximity to Jamaica. J.C.M. Oglesby, "Spain's Havana Squadron and the Preservation of the Balance of Power in

the Caribbean, 1740–1748,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 49 (August 1969): 475.

101. On the Cartagena siege, see in particular Charles E. Nowell, “The Defense of Cartagena,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 42 (November 1962): 477–501; James Alexander Robertson, “The English Attack on Cartagena in 1741; and Plans for an Attack on Panama,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 2 (February 1919): 62–71; Pares, *War and Trade*, 85–97.

102. Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry*, 93.

103. Instructions to Anson quoted in Glyn Williams, *The Prize of All the Oceans: The Triumph and Tragedy of Anson's Voyage Round the World* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 104. On Anson's voyage see also Pares, *War and Trade*, 104–8.

104. Great Britain, Merchants, Sufferers by the Spanish Depredations before June 2, 1721. Cy to Great Britain. House of Commons, 1746. Sydney Papers, f. 3, CL.

105. *Original Letters to an Honest Sailor* (London: R. Thomas, 1746), 27. This quote comes from an October 11, 1740 letter from Wager to Vernon.

106. Until British troops arrived in sufficient numbers, Jamaica was reliant on the same sorts of forces that they had amassed against the Maroons during the beginning of the war. Governor Trelawny complained that these soldiers did not believe they had to obey the officers, and he even asked for an official order from the king to reinforce the officers' authority. Letter from Trelawny to Newcastle, January 6, 1738/1739. CO 137/56/177, TNA.

107. David Campbell's Opinion Re: Chief Prospective sites of attack in the Spanish Indies during the Present War. January 7, 1741. MS 458, NLJ.

108. Pares, *War and Trade*, 227–64.

109. J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 149–69.

110. Edward Trelawny Letters 1740–1750. Letter to Mr. Pelham, May 17, 1741, Jamaica. MS 306, NLJ.

111. The white population of Jamaica was only 8,230 in 1730 and about 10,000 in 1752, according to Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 16.

112. Edward Trelawny to Rt Honble Mr. Pelham, May 17, 1741, Jamaica, MS 306 Edward Trelawny Letters 1740–1750, NLJ.

113. Georgia Historical Society, *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society*, 7: 3, *The Spanish Official Account of the Attack on the Colony of Georgia, in America, and of its Defeat on St. Simons Island by General James Oglethorpe* (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1913), 4. This volume contains translations of sources from the Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla dealing with the planning and execution of the Spanish attack on Georgia.

114. “The Governor General of Cuba Appoints the Governor of Florida Commander of the Expedition against Georgia, and Issues his Orders for the Conduct of Operations,” in Georgia Historical Society, *Collections*, 32–34.

115. Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry*, 91. Slaves running away to the Spanish colonies were expected to convert to Catholicism, and were subsequently granted freedom and land.

116. Repeated *cedulas* issued by the Spanish crown had promised slaves the opportunity for freedom if they left the English and converted to Catholicism. One of the major reasons for arguments against allowing slavery in Georgia was its proximity to St. Augustine, a major destination for runaway slaves trying to gain their freedom in this way. See Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, 35. In part this fear was related to the high slave to white ratio in the Carolina colonies. Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry*, 79.

117. Nicholas Lawes to the Lords Commissioners for Trade &c. August 24, 1720. CO 137/13/2/44, TNA.

118. Pares, *War and Trade*, 99.

119. Report of Edward Trelawny, Governor of Jamaica, to Duke of Newcastle re Lt. Hodgson's Expedition Among the Mosquito Indians in Nicaragua, 1742. June 14, 1741. MS 306, MS 460, NLJ.

120. Letter from Edward Trelawny to the Duke of Newcastle, September 22, 1739. CO 137/56/253, TNA.

121. Don Sebastian de Eslava to Edward Vernon, June 30, 1741. CO 5/12/93, TNA.

122. Nowell, "The Defense of Cartagena," 481.

123. Copy of a letter from the South Sea Company's Factors to M Trelawny dated September 30, 1739. CO 137/56/275–6, TNA. On the admiral, see Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia, *Don Blas de Lezo: Defensor de Cartagena de Indias* (Bogota: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2002). The factors finally arrived at Jamaica June 26, 1740, as reported in: James Houstoun to Peter Burrell, Jamaica, July 28, 1740. Shelburne Collection 44, f. 691, CL.

124. *The American Traveller; Being a new Historical Collection Carefully compiled from Original Memoirs in several Languages and the most authentic Voyages and Travels* (London: J. Fuller, 1743), 395.

125. Copy M. Trelawny to the Governor of St. Jago de Cuba Jamaica, August 4, 1740. CO 137/56/389, TNA.

126. Ibid. There are numerous other examples of Spanish prisoners being captured by the British in the Spanish records. See for example Jamaica, November 24, 1739, Santa Fe 1155, n.f., AGI.

127. James Houstoun to Peter Burrell, Jamaica, July 28, 1740, Shelburne Collection 44, f. 692, CL.

128. Letter from Charles Wager to Edward Vernon. *Original Letters to an Honest Sailor*, 44–45.

129. Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 216–18.

130. A remarkably detailed example of this conflict, involving traded insults, assault, and an eventual court case, can be found in the Shelburne Collection 44, f. 695–726, CL. Particular thanks to Kristen Block for alerting me to this source.

131. Houstoun, *Works*, 219.

132. Ibid., 222.

133. Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 228.
134. Houstoun, *Works*, 223.
135. Houstoun, *Memoirs*, 249.
136. *Ibid.*, 257–61.
137. *Ibid.*, 224.
138. George H. Nelson, “Contraband Trade under the Asiento, 1730–1739,” *American Historical Review* 51 (October 1945): 61–62. Flour in particular was difficult to come by in the Spanish empire in times of crisis. During the second half of the century, the British North American colonies supplied large amounts of flour to Spain’s American holdings, despite the official ban on this trade. See Sherry Johnson, *Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba and the Atlantic World in the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 79.

Epilogue: Beyond the Asiento

1. J. Leitch Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in North America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 97–100. For the text of this treaty see Great Britain, *A Collection of all the treaties of peace, alliance, and commerce, between Great-Britain and other powers, from the revolution in 1688, to the present time*, vol. 2 (London, 1772), 68–107.
2. Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry*, 102.
3. Great Britain. *A Collection of all the treaties*, 108.
4. Jean O. McLachlan, *Trade and Peace in Old Spain, 1667–1750: A Study of the Influence of Commerce on Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 122. This agreement with Spain was a reversal of earlier ministerial policies. Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714–1783* (New York: Allen Lane, 2007), 381.
5. Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry*, 99.
6. Letter from Edward Trelawny to Thomas Pelham, November 1, 1741, Jamaica. MS 305, n.f., NLJ.
7. Dorothy Burne Goebel, “British Trade to the Spanish Colonies, 1796–1823,” *American Historical Review* 43 (January 1938): 306.
8. Letter from Edward Manning, Jamaica, October 4, 1748. Shelburne Collection, 44, f. 683, CL.
9. *Considerations on the American Trade, before and since the Establishment of the South-Sea Company* (London: J. Roberts, 1739), 15. James Houstoun disputes this, arguing that the South Sea Company exported twice the number of African slaves to the Spanish Americas as compared to all of the private traders when the *asiento* was not enacted. Houstoun, *A true and Impartial Account of the Rise and Progress of the South Sea Company: Wherein the Assiento Contract is Particularly considered; Proving the Great Advantages that would have accrued to England by a Faithful Observance of it on the Part of Spain* (London: T. Cooper, 1743), 14–15.

10. *Considerations on the American Trade*, 9.
11. *An Essay on the Causes of the Decline of the Foreign Trade, Consequently of the Value of the Lands of Britain, and On the Means to Restore Both. Begun in the Year 1739* (London: John Brotherton, 1744), 24.
12. See in particular A Considerable Stockholder, *An Enquiry into the Misconduct and Frauds . . .* (London: R. Walker, 1736), 53.
13. John Brewer, *Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 175.
14. John Campbell, *The Spanish Empire in America* (London: M. Cooper, 1747), 289.
15. *Ibid.*, 308. Objections to the trade based on moral concerns about slavery were still quite rare. Jack Greene, *Evaluating Empire and Confronting Colonialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 158.
16. Houstoun, *True and Impartial Account*, 11.
17. Houstoun specifically complains that the company fired all of its servants at once in the 1730s on unfounded accusations of mass promotion of private trade, which was the occasion of him leaving the company's service in the Spanish Americas. Houstoun, *True and Impartial Account*, 21–26.
18. Ord. James, ALS to Henry Pelham, inclosing Manning to Ord, May 3, 1751, and Ord, "The Present State of the African Trade" September 1751, Sydney Papers, CL.
19. Peter Burnet to the Governors of the Royal Company. Mexico, September 23, 1748, Shelburne Collection 44, f. 236–37, CL.
20. Richard Pares contrasts this to the disliked French trade, in which British capital was needed to pay for foreign goods. *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739–1763* (London: Frank Cass, 1963), 411.
21. Jean O. McLachlan, "The Seven Years' Peace, and the West Indian Policy of Carvajal and Wall," *English Historical Review* 53 (July 1938): 457–77. Lawrence Henry Gipson adopts the same term for this period in his article "British Diplomacy in the Light of the Anglo-Spanish New World Issues, 1750–1757," *American Historical Review* 51 (July 1946): 627–48.
22. Gipson, "British Diplomacy," 637.
23. Xabier Lamikiz, "Transatlantic Networks and Merchant Guild Rivalry in Colonial Trade with Peru, 1729–1780: A New Interpretation," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91, 2 (2011): 312.
24. Gipson reports that English subjects had been cutting logwood on the Spanish Main since 1638: "British Diplomacy," 633.
25. Richard Wall to Benjamin Keene. Buen Retiro September 15, 1754, Add. Mss. 3680, f. 8, BL.
26. McLachlan attributes the decline of cooperation in 1757 to logwood disputes: McLachlan, "The Seven Year's Peace," 457. Numbers for this population of Britons vary, but Gipson notes that there were about 1,500 Britons living in the area in 1715, and Brown relates that in 1753 there were about 2,000 British settlers and African slaves living among 8,000 Miskito Indians. Gipson, "British Diplomacy," 634; Vera Lee Brown,

“Anglo-Spanish Relations in America, 1763–1770,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 5 (August 1992): 351.

27. Merchants in the Northern colonies were earning about £160,000 annually from the logwood produced from these settlements. Gipson, “British Diplomacy,” 634.

28. *The Constitutional Querist, Containing the Sentiments of an Impartial Englishman on the Present Rupture with Spain, its Political State, Internal Weakness, and Best Method of Attacking Her* (London: W. Nicoll, 1762), 37.

29. Richard Lodge, “Presidential Address: Sir Benjamin Keene, K.B.: A Study in Anglo-Spanish Relations in the Earlier Part of the Eighteenth Century,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4:15 (1932): 11.

30. Thomas M. Truxes, *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), deals with the contraband trading between the British and French on the New York border.

31. Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Empires: The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713–1826* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 18.

32. Ralph Lee Woodward, “Spanish Commercial Policy in Louisiana, 1763–1803,” *Louisiana History: Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 44 (Spring 2003): 136; Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry*, 108.

33. John Robert McNeill, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain: Louisbourg and Havana, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 167. On the British occupation of Havana, see Elena Schneider, “The Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Cuba” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2011).

34. Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry*, 117.

35. Woodward, “Spanish Commercial Policy in Louisiana,” 146. On earlier colonial Louisiana, see in particular Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

36. Alan Christelow, “Contraband Trade Between Jamaica and the Spanish Main, and the Three Port Act of 1766,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 22 (May 1942): 314.

37. Robert Allen, *The Great Importance of the Havannah, Set Forth in an Essay on the Nature and Methods of Carrying on a Trade to the South Sea, and the Spanish West Indies* (London: J. Hinxman, 1762), 22. On Allen’s experience in Spanish America, see J. D. Aslop and Robert Allen, “A Darien Epilogue: Robert Allen in Spanish America, 1698–1707” *Americas* 43, 2 (October 1986): 197–201.

38. Christelow notes the continued enthusiasm among the British for trade to the Spanish for both specie and natural resources. Christelow, “Contraband Trade,” 314.

39. Sherry Johnson, *Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba and the Atlantic World in the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 63–80.

40. John Wright, *The West-India Merchant, Factor and Supercargoes Daily Assistant* (London: David Steel, 1765), xvii.

41. Liss, *Atlantic Empires*, 19.

42. Trevor Burnard and Kenneth Morgan, “Dynamics of the Slave Market and Slave

Purchasing in Jamaica, 1655–1788,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (January 2001): 210. Burnard and Morgan note that from 1759 to 1773 the Spanish did not seek slaves in Jamaica, though of course the clandestine nature of contraband trade makes it impossible to determine the volume of the illegal trade in slaves that may have persisted in the interim. On 1773, see also Contratación, 5758, Cádiz, July 1, 1773, n.f, AGI.

43. David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 15.

44. The company’s position and Anglo-Spanish trade at the end of the eighteenth century is covered at length in Goebel, “British Trade to the Spanish Colonies,” 305–6.

45. Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 119.

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INDEX

- Allen, Robert, 12, 154
- Anne, Queen, 15, 23–24, 34
- arming of slaves, 74–75, 106, 131, 137–38
- asiento treaty, 12–13, 15–16, 18, 23–28, 49, 52, 124, 146, 149–50; alleged violations of, 30, 67, 110, 130, 176n100; arguments in favor of, 149–50; attempts to circumvent, 35, 45, 89–90; breakdown of, 144–45; Bubb's renegotiation of, 48–50, 53, 55; contraband trade and, 13, 25, 34, 56, 81, 86, 92, 143–44; debates and controversy surrounding, 29–34, 50, 125, 148–10; end of, 147–50, 152; France and, 23, 28, 32, 47, 154; implementation of, 34–40, 45, 52, 84; interrupted by war, 60, 69, 77–79, 84, 121–23, 140–42; Jamaica and, 30–31, 39, 47–48, 57, 80, 87, 97, 147; permission ships and, 40, 45, 49; Portobello trade fair and, 15; religious conflict and, 97–98; signing of, 23; slave trade and, 12, 18, 23, 25, 35, 41, 49–51, 85, 86, 90, 125
- Blechynden, Thomas, 77–78
- Bonny, Anne, 72
- British Free Port Act, 155
- British settlements. *See* English New World settlements
- British trade. *See* English-Spanish trade
- Brown, John, 118–19, 193n22
- Bubb Doddington, George, 48–50; treaty negotiated by, 50, 53, 55
- Buenos Aires, 27, 34–35, 38–39, 60, 67, 69, 76, 88; Dover in, 21–22, 38; slave trade and, 35, 75, 175n82, 181n50; South Sea Company factory in, 15, 24, 27, 52, 75, 118–19
- Burnet, John, 18, 53–54, 63–68, 81; correspondence with Sloane, 64–66, 79, 82; defection of, 81–83; as naturalist, 63–67, 180n36; War of 1727 and, 76, 79; War of the Quadruple Alliance and, 60
- Burrell, Peter, 111
- Cádiz, 12, 24, 39, 49, 56, 149–50, 166n46
- Caracciolo, Carmine, 35
- Carpenter, Nicholas, 98
- Cartagena, 39, 116, 119–23; British attack on, 135–37
- Carvajal y Lancaster, José de, 151
- Catholicism, 98–101; conversion of Native Americans to, 11; conversion of slaves to, 97, 103, 199n116; English-Spanish trade and, 26, 51, 97; feared ill effects of exposure to, 98–99, 102; intermarriage and, 43, 99; religious conflict and, 97–103, 115; Spanish monarchy and, 10. *See also* religious conflict; Spanish Inquisition
- Charles II, 10
- Cocke, Leonard, 94, 109
- Collit, Samuel, 101
- Compañía Gaditana de Negros, 154
- Company of Scotland, 7–8
- contraband trade, 12, 19, 40, 53, 79, 81, 85–92, 96, 113, 139, 143–44, 152, 154, 174n76, 186n21; asiento treaty and, 13, 25, 34, 56, 81; attempts to combat, 28, 57, 61, 71–71, 74, 86–87, 89–92; British support of, 76–78, 121; in flour, 45, 144, 154, 177n117, 200n138; following end of asiento, 151; interimperial conflict over, 16, 19, 55, 57, 76, 84–86, 90, 96–97, 106, 124, 144, 152; interimperial cooperation and, 54, 56, 86; Jesuits and, 181n46; penalties for, 12, 28, 46, 85, 89, 128; on permission ships, 88; piracy and, 73–74, 91; Portuguese colonies and, 89; slave trade and, 28, 30, 68, 125, 202n42; South Sea Company and, 16, 23, 34–35, 56, 78, 81, 85–90, 116, 124, 148, 154, 174n66. *See also* smuggling

Convention of El Pardo, 134

Cornejo, Don Francisco, 121

Cudjoe, 107–8

Dampier, William, 5–6, 9, 34, 163n17

Darien Indians, 8. *See also* Kuna Indians

Darien settlement, 7–8, 115, 131; map of, 132

Defoe, Daniel, 10, 32–34, 42, 173n62

Dennis, Jonathan, 18, 84–85, 94, 111; Spanish Inquisition and, 100–101

Dover, Thomas, 18, 21–22, 34, 38, 42; *asiento* treaty and, 26–27; liminal status of, 28; as naturalist, 43; recall of, 51, 178n134

Dutch empire. *See* Netherlands

East India Company, 24–25

Ecuador, 12, 22

English New World settlements, 9, 176n104, 179n20; *asiento* treaty and, 33; calls for territorial expansion, 4, 127–28, 131, 133–34, 146, 162n6, 165n39; in central America, 7–8, 152, 201n26; collapse of, 156; contraband trade from, 152; debate over desirability of, 31–32; in North America, 9, 75, 153, 196n4; proposed in South America, 7, 8–9, 163n22, 173n59; War of 1727 and, 79; War of Jenkins's Ear and, 130–31, 133; War of the Quadruple Alliance and, 61. *See also* Georgia; Jamaica; Virginia

English-French relations. *See* France

English-Spanish trade, 9–10, 12, 109–11, 164n34; *asiento* treaty and, 12–13, 15–16, 18, 22–28, 49; breakdown of, 18–19, 111–12, 113, 144–45; Buenos Aires and, 38; Cartagena and, 39; debates over *asiento* treaty, 29–34; Defoe's arguments in favor of, 32–34; disrupted by individual Britons, 80–81; English settlements and, 33; following end of *asiento*, 147–52, 154–57; intelligence value of, 109, 162n5; interimperial conflict and, 54–55, 84, 96, 109–11, 123, 125, 131, 139–40, 143–44, 152–53; Jamaica and, 30–31, 38–39; piracy and, 71–72; religious issues in, 26, 51, 97; renegotiation of *asiento* treaty and, 48–50, 54, 55; slave revolts and, 108; smuggling and, 16, 25, 34, 40, 47, 55, 85, 124, 154; threatened by contraband trade, 90–91; War of 1727 and, 79; War of the Quadruple Alliance and, 57, 59, 74. *See also* *asiento* treaty; contraband trade; smuggling

factors (of South Sea Company), 41–44, 53–55, 63–68, 108–9; Catholicism and, 51, 102; conflict among, 116–17, 118–19, 142, 193n22; criticism of, 116–18; defection of, 82; early challenges faced by, 44–45; end of *asiento* treaty and, 150, 156; harassment by Spanish Inquisition, 85, 97–98, 100–101; identification with Spanish, 118; impact of international conflict on, 53, 140–41; intelligence value of, 108–9, 141–42; as naturalists, 43, 63–65, 180n36; potential friendly relationships with Spanish, 15, 43, 67, 113, 118–19, 141, 143, 156; private trade conducted by, 81, 88–89, 116, 122–23, 125, 142–44, 201n17; religious conflict and, 97–98; of Royal African Company, 116; slave trade and, 75, 78, 120; War of 1727 and, 76–77. South Sea Company

Fandiño, Don Juan de León, 94–95

Florida, 9, 138, 153

flour, smuggling of, 45, 144, 154, 177n117, 200n138

France: *asiento* treaty and, 23, 28, 32, 47, 154; contraband trade and, 86, 89; English-French relations, 5–6, 10, 30, 151, 196n75, 201n20; French-Spanish trade, 3, 24, 26, 30, 32; involvement in slave trade, 13, 85, 154; Jamaica and, 31, 47, 105; Louisiana territory and, 153–54; War of Spanish Succession and, 10–11

Gage, Thomas, 40, 163n14, 165n35

Georgia, 65, 124, 130, 199n116; Spanish attacks on, 107, 109, 138–39

Gilligan, Manuel Manasses, 23

Gray, John, 141

Grimes, Gilbert, 34

guardacostas, 19, 30, 71–72, 91–92, 94, 147–49, 154, 187n31; considered pirates, 46, 71, 91–92; interimperial conflict and, 72, 74, 91, 95–96, 113, 124, 128–29, 134

Guayaquil, 22

Hall, Fayrer, 11, 30–31, 133

Halley, Edmond, 66

Hamilton, Archibald, 46

Harley, Robert, 24, 32

Havana, 15, 24, 61, 73, 96, 147–48; English seizure of, 133, 153, 197n89

Henriquez, Miguel, 95

- Heywood, Peter, 47
- Honduras, 152, 201n26
- Hope, Thomas, 123
- Hosier, Francis, 76, 78, 121–22
- House of Bourbon, 10–11; reforms, 38, 56, 90, 124, 126, 130, 151
- Houstoun, James, 18, 113–23, 149, 151, 191n1; liminal status of, 122; as naturalist, 194n36; private trade of, 122–23, 125, 142–44, 201n17; relationship with Spanish, 119–20, 121–22, 140, 143; support of British settlement, 131
- Houstoun, William, 65
- Humphreys, Francis, 119, 141
- Hunter, Robert, 93, 107
- illegal trade. *See* contraband trade; smuggling
- Inquisition. *See* Spanish Inquisition
- Isthmus of Panama, 40, 163n22; British settlement in, 131; English-Spanish conflict in, 4; exploration of, 5; map of, 132
- Jamaica, 3, 12, 30–31, 36, 47, 56–57, 105, 162n7; demographics of, 175n84, 198n111; illnesses suffered by British in, 106; piracy and, 3, 30, 46–48, 71–72, 162n9; post-asiento trade and, 155; relationship with South Sea Company, 87–88; slave rebellions in, 104–8; slave trade in, 30, 38–39, 47, 56, 188n50, 202n42; Spanish subjects on, 101–2; War of Jenkins's Ear and, 137–38, 198n106; War of the Quadruple Alliance and, 58–60
- Jamestown settlement, 5, 9
- Jenkins, Robert, 95, 126–27. *See also* War of Jenkins's Ear
- Johnson, Robert, 34–35
- Keene, Benjamin, 89, 94, 102
- Kent, Matthew, 76–77
- Knight, Robert, 69–70, 131
- Kuna Indians, 4, 8
- Lezo, Blas de, 140–41
- logwood, 61, 91, 142
- Louisiana territory, 153
- Manning, Edward, 111, 142, 147–48
- maps, 60–61; *A Map of the West-Indies or the Islands of America in the North Sea*, 62; of South Sea Company factories, 37; of territorial claims, 14
- Maroon communities, 84, 104–8; treaty with British, 107–8
- Merewether, John, 87, 111, 142
- Millar, Robert, 65
- Miskito Indians, 139, 201n26
- Modyford, Thomas, 30
- Moll, Herman, 10–11, 33, 60–61, 180n21; map by, 62
- Moore, Arthur, 34–35
- Native American-European relations: Darien settlement and, 8; enslavement of Native American people, 4; Kuna people and, 4, 8; use of Native American soldiers, 139
- natural sciences, 63–66, 180n36, 181nn44, 46
- Navigation Acts, 26, 171n25
- Netherlands, the, 57–58; contraband trade and, 28, 78, 177n117; Dutch-Spanish trade, 23, 31, 86, 89, 111, 139; involvement in slave trade, 13
- New Granada, 39, 56, 120
- Onslow, Thomas, 47–48
- Ord, James, 123, 141, 194n40
- Panama. *See* Isthmus of Panama
- Partington, Henry, 34–35, 38
- Patiño, Joseph, 101, 126
- Peace of Utrecht, 11–12, 47, 57; violations of, 46–47, 134
- Pelham, Henry, 137–38, 150
- permission ships, 24–25, 45, 49–50, 80, 98, 110, 150; asiento treaty and, 40, 45, 49; illegal goods on, 45, 55, 78, 81, 88; protection of, 121
- Petiver, James, 43, 54, 64, 66, 181n46
- Philip V, 10, 23, 134
- piracy, 2, 19, 68, 70–74, 91–96, 106, 162n9, 182n57, 183n67; amnesty for pirates, 5; attempts to suppress, 19, 72–74, 92, 133, 182n64; contrasted with privateering, 74, 182n59; crimes attributed to pirates, 94–96, 183n68; government support for, 73, 126–27, 187n31; *guardacostas* and, 19, 30, 46, 71, 91–92, 129, 187n31; in Jamaica, 30, 172n41; Jamaica and, 3, 30, 46–47, 71–72, 162n9; law-abiding behavior of, 183n67; leading to interimperial conflict, 2, 16, 19, 53, 55, 70–74, 76, 86, 91, 95–97, 126–27, 144; seizure of ships as, 46–47; Wafer as pirate, 2–6; War of the Quadruple Alliance and, 57–58. *See also* privateering

- Pitt, John, 50
- Plowes, Matthew, 81–82
- Portobello, 4, 15, 38–40, 45, 49, 110; interimperial conflict in, 77–78, 121, 135, 139, 141, 143; slave trade in, 69, 78, 148
- Portobello trade fair, 6, 24, 40, 55, 78, 143; asiento treaty and, 15; South Sea Company and, 2–3, 24, 49, 55–56
- Portuguese empire, 10, 60, 89; asiento contract and, 47; contraband trade and, 89; involvement in slave trade, 13, 154
- Potosí, 13, 32, 38
- privateering, 2, 57–58, 93, 162n5; attempts to suppress, 74; contrasted with piracy, 74, 182n59; interimperial conflict and, 58, 86, 96; official support of, 57, 94–95, 128, 187n31; piracy and, 70–71, 91. *See also* piracy
- Puerto Rico, 11, 95; calls for British colonization of, 133–34
- Pullen, John, 29–30
- Pym, James, 45
- Rackam, John, 72–73, 183n67
- Read, Mary, 72
- religious conflict, 97–103, 115, 167n55; slave trade and, 97, 103, 188n49, 199n116. *See also* Catholicism; Spanish Inquisition
- Rogers, Woodes, 21, 74–75
- Royal African Company, 13, 30, 33, 69, 114, 116, 146; South Sea Company and, 35–36, 182n53
- Royal Society, 64, 65, 82, 122
- Scotland, 113–15, 192n6; Darien settlement, 7–8
- seizure of ships, 30, 46–47, 58–59, 74, 85, 92–94, 152; interimperial conflict and, 46, 55, 58, 71, 76, 84, 92, 96, 126, 128–29; by pirates, 71, 93–94; restitution for, 129, 134; as retaliation for carrying contraband, 59, 74, 89–91, 128, 144; South Sea Company and, 76, 85, 92–93; during wartime, 55, 57, 80
- Seven Years' War, 152–53, 155–56
- Shelvocke, George, 58, 70, 183n68
- slave insurrections, 44, 104–8, 128; arming of slaves and, 131, 138; encouraged by British, 131. *See also* Maroon communities
- slave trade, 12–13, 15, 18, 55, 68–69, 104, 146, 166n48; abolition of, 155, 171n23; arming of slaves, 74–75, 106, 131, 137–38; asiento treaty and, 12, 18, 23, 25, 35, 41, 49–51, 85, 86, 90, 125; contraband trade and, 68, 125, 146, 202n42; disruptive effect of, 104; enslavement of Native American people, 4; following end of asiento, 149–50, 154; Houstoun's opinion of, 120; importation of enslaved Africans to New World, 13, 25; interimperial conflict and, 78, 104, 106–7; interimperial cooperation in, 108; Jamaica's role in, 30, 38–39, 47, 56, 188n50, 202n42; Maroon communities and, 104–8; Peace of Utrecht and, 12; profitability of, 173n64; religious conflict and, 97, 103, 188n49; religious conversion of slaves, 103, 199n116; smallpox and, 114; smuggling of slaves, 77–78, 85–87; South Sea Company and, 2–3, 15, 23–25, 35–36, 50, 87, 90, 104, 116, 147–48, 170n14, 181n50, 200n9; during wartime, 147–48
- Sloane, Hans, 43, 64; Burnet's correspondence with, 64–66, 79, 82
- South Sea Company, 16, 17, 24–25, 146–47; Catholicism and, 26, 51, 97, 100, 103; challenges faced by, 44–49, 70, 97; compensation paid to, 147; contraband trade and, 16, 23, 34–35, 56, 78, 80–81, 85–90, 116, 124, 148, 154, 174n66; criticism of, 80, 117, 148–49; Defoe's support of, 32–34; end of asiento treaty and, 147–50; English settlement and, 27, 32; factories of, 37, 41; factors of, 41–44, 53–55, 63–68, 83, 84–85, 108–9, 116–17; interimperial conflict and, 109–10; Jamaica and, 56–57, 87; map of factories, 37; Portobello trade fair and, 2–3, 24, 49, 55–56; post-asiento trade and, 156; profitability of, 173n64; Royal African Company and, 35, 69, 182n53; seizure of ships and, 76, 85, 92–93; slave trade and, 2–3, 15, 23–24, 35–36, 50, 87, 90, 104, 116, 147–48, 170n14, 181n50, 200n9; smuggling and, 16, 40, 53, 78, 81, 85, 139, 148, 177n117; Spanish Inquisition and, 51, 98, 100–101; stock bubble and, 17, 25, 31, 69–70; Treaty of Seville and, 81; War of 1727 and, 76–77, 80; War of Spanish Succession and, 25, 31; War of the Quadruple Alliance and, 60. *See also* factors
- Spanish Inquisition, 51, 98, 100–101, 127–28, 161n4; harassment of factors by, 85, 97–98, 100–101; slave trade and, 103; South Sea Company and, 51, 98, 101
- Spanish trade. *See* English-Spanish trade; France; Netherlands
- Spotswood, Alexander, 79
- Stanhope, James, 46, 49

- Stewart, Charles, 95
 Stratford, Francis, 98
 Swartz, Bartholomew, 77
- Thrupp, John, 51–52, 178n135
 Towgood, Micaiah, 125–26
 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, 147
 Treaty of Madrid, 147–48, 150
 Treaty of Seville, 80–81
 Trelawny, Edward, 105, 137–41, 147, 198n106
- Ulloa, Antonio de, 39–40
- Vernon, Edward, 131, 135, 140, 143
 Virginia, 5, 79
- Wafer, Lionel, 1–8, 34, 161n1, 162n10, 164n29;
 “Secret Report” of, 6–7
 Wager, Charles, 135, 142
 Wall, Don Miguel, 109
- Wall, Richard, 151
 Walpole, Robert, 80
 War of 1727, 76–83, 123
 War of Jenkins’s Ear, 95, 113, 130–31, 134–37,
 146–47; attempts to circumvent, 134; British
 losses from disease, 137; British support of,
 125–27, 129–30, 195n51; causes of, 124, 134,
 195n53; effect of on trade, 143–44; impact of
 on factors, 140–41; territorial expansion and,
 130–31, 133; use of Native American soldiers
 in, 139
 War of Spanish Succession, 10, 29; English-
 Spanish trade and, 29, 30; piracy and, 72;
 South Sea Company and, 25, 31
 War of the Austrian Succession, 139, 146
 War of the Quadruple Alliance, 56–63, 70, 74
 Wood, William, 31
 Wooders, William, 6
 Woodin, William, 102

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